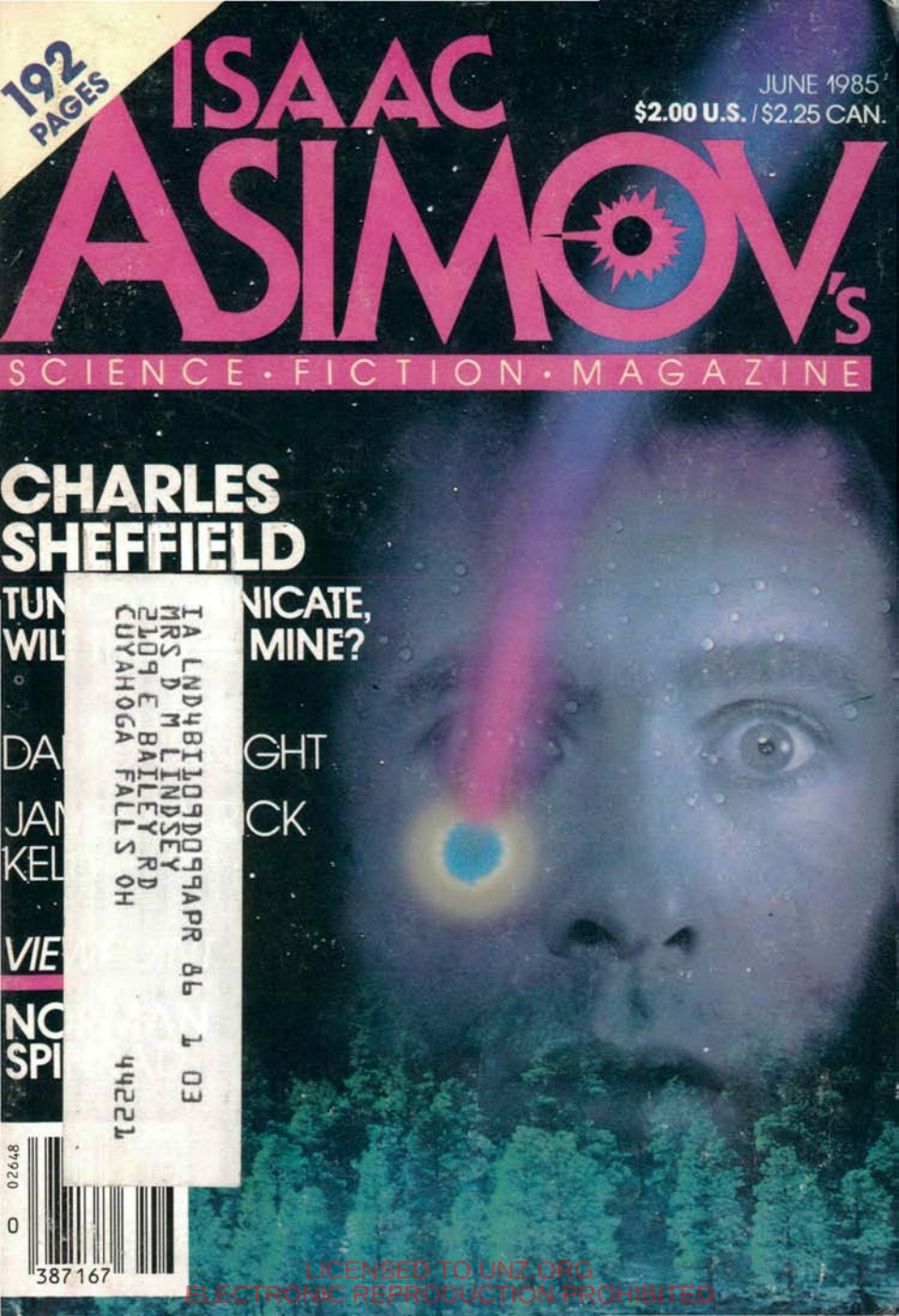
192 PAGES

ISAAC ASIMOV'S

JUNE 1985
$2.00 U.S. / $2.25 CAN.

SCIENCE · FICTION · MAGAZINE



CHARLES SHEFFIELD

TUN NICATE,
WIL MINE?

DA GHT

JAN CK
KEL

VIE

NO
SPI

IA LND4BIL09D09APR 86 1 03
MRS D M LINDSEY
2109 E BAILEY RD
CUYAHOGA FALLS OH
44221

0 02648
387167

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"IT REMINDED ME OF *LUCIFER'S HAMMER*."

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CONCERNED SCIENTIST
DISCOVERS THE ULTIMATE WEAPON?

THE PEACE WAR

A Novel By

Vernor Vinge

"FASCINATING...A STRONG CONTENDER FOR NEXT YEAR'S AWARDS"
—*Locus*

"CONVEYS THE EXCITEMENT OF A CONCEPTUAL BREAKTHROUGH"
—*Publishers Weekly*

"WILL APPEAL TO FANS of SF AND INTRIGUE ALIKE"
—*Library Journal*

"...SUPERB. IT REMINDED ME OF *LUCIFER'S HAMMER*."
—*VOYA*

BAEN BOOKS

JUNE 55965-6 • 400 pp. • $3.50

Distributed by
Simon & Schuster
Mass Merchandise Sales Company
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, N.Y. 10020

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

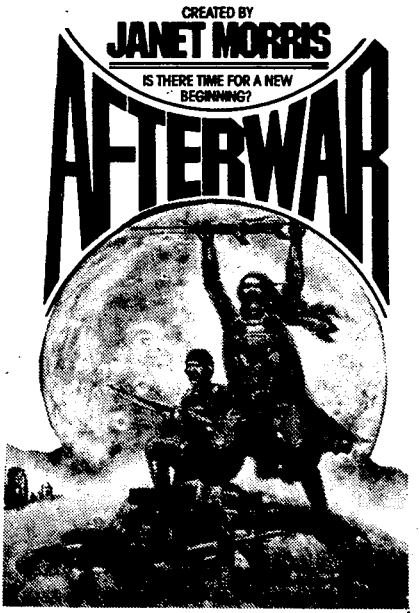
Even as her parents lie dying, the armies of the Mel'Nir swarm across the borders. So must Aidris, Princess and heir to the kingdom of Chameln, learn first to survive – and then to control the power within her, against the day when her people claim her as their Queen.

"Enthralling and romantic." – *Booklist*

"Lovely...finely crafted."
– *School Library Journal*

"A hard-hitting game of survival."
– *The Denver Post*

JUNE • 55966-4 • 352 pp. • $2.95



The next World War will last only an hour, but its shadow will reign a thousand years...Evocations of the Day After War by C. J. Cherryh, Gregory Benford, David Drake. Created by Janet Morris.

JUNE • 55967-2 • 288 pp. • $2.95

BAEN BOOKS
Distributed by Simon & Schuster
Mass Merchandise Sales Co.
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, N.Y. 10020

BAEN BOOKS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

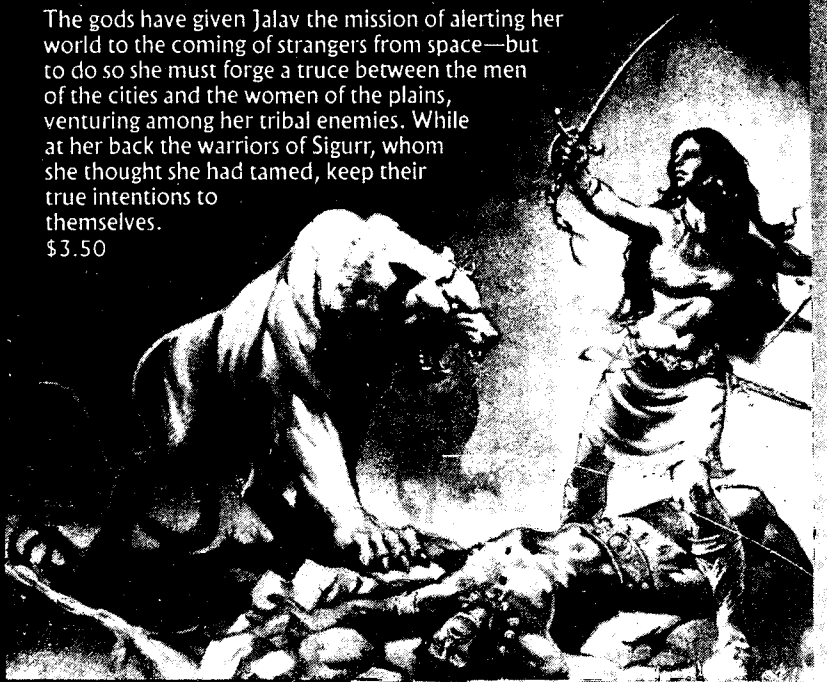
"Sharon Green has opened up a whole new area of adventure fantasy." —*Romantic Times*

JALAV-AMAZON WARRIOR: IV

THE WILL OF THE GODS

by Sharon Green

The gods have given Jalav the mission of alerting her world to the coming of strangers from space—but to do so she must forge a truce between the men of the cities and the women of the plains, venturing among her tribal enemies. While at her back the warriors of Sigurr, whom she thought she had tamed, keep their true intentions to themselves.
$3.50

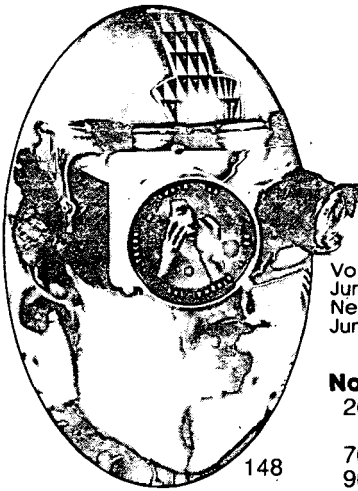


The Exclusive Science Fiction and Fantasy Line Selected by DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

DAW FANTASY

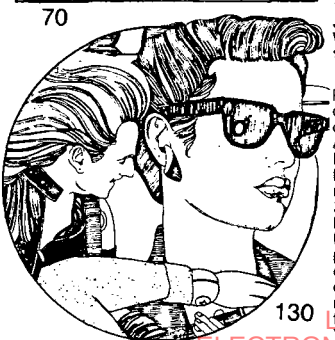
Distributed by NAL NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



148

70



130

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

Vol. 9 No. 6 (whole no. 92)
June 1985
Next issue on sale
June 4, 1985

Novelettes

26 Tunicate, Tunicate, Wilt Thou Be Mine? — Charles Sheffield
70 Marie — Jennifer Swift
90 Pages From Cold Harbor — Richard Grant
130 The Price — Stephen Gallagher
148 Solstice — James Patrick Kelly

Short Stories

88 A Fantasy — Damon Knight
112 The Thunder of the Captains — Garry Kilworth

Departments

4 Editorial: Symbolism — Isaac Asimov
10 Letters
17 Mooney's Module — Gerry Mooney
22 Gaming — Dana Lombardy
24 Animal TTT — Martin Gardner
62 Alternate Viewpoint — Norman Spinrad
183 On Books — Baird Searles
192 The SF Conventional Calendar — Erwin S. Strauss

Poems by Susan Palwick, E. M. Schorb, and Karin C. Warren

Cover art for "Tunicate, Tunicate, Wilt Thou Be Mine?" by John Raffo

Joel Davis: President & Publisher — **Isaac Asimov:** Editorial Director
William F. Battista: Associate Publisher — **Shawna McCarthy:** Editor
Terri Czeczko: Art Editor — **Sheila Williams:** Associate Editor

Published 13 times a year by Davis Publications, Inc. at $2.00 per copy ($2.25 per copy in Canada). Annual subscription of thirteen issues $19.50 in the United States and U.S. possessions. In all other countries $24.20, payable in advance in U.S. funds. Address for subscriptions and all other correspondence about them, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305. Address for all editorial matters: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine® is the registered trademark of Davis Publications, Inc. © 1985 by Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Second class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. POSTMASTER, send form 3579 to IASfm, Box 1933, Marion OH 43306. In Canada return to 625 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1. ISSN 0162-2188.

Internet Archive
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORIAL

SYMBOLISM

by Isaac Asimov

To a child, a story is a story, and to many of us, as we grow older, a story remains a story. The good guy wins, the bad guy loses. Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl. We don't want anything beyond that—at least to begin with.

The trouble is that if that's all there is, one is likely to grow weary eventually. Children love to play tick-tack-toe, for instance, but it's such a limited game that, after a while, most children don't want to play it any more. In the same way, children, as they grow older, may stop wanting to read stories that are only stories.

Since writers get as tired writing stories that are only stories, as readers get tired reading them, it is only natural that writers begin to search for new and different ways to tell a story—for their own mental health, if nothing else.

A writer can try to find a new kind of plot, or he can indulge in stylistic experimentation, or he can strive for events that are ambiguous and conclusions that are inconclusive, or he can blur the distinction between good and evil, or between dream and reality. There are many, many things he can do and the one thing all these attempts have in common is that they annoy those readers who still are in the stage of wanting stories that are only stories.

Mind you, I don't sneer at such readers. For one thing, I myself still write stories that are primarily stories, because that's what *I* like. In my stories, there is a clear beginning, a clear middle, and a clear end, the good guy usually wins, and so on.

Nevertheless, you can't blame writers and readers for wanting something more than that, and those of us (I include myself, please note) who are suspicious of experimentation and fancy tricks, ought to make some effort to understand what's going on. We may fail to grasp it entirely, but we may at least see just enough to avoid an explosion of unreasonable anger.

One game that writers very commonly play is the one called "symbolism." A story can be written on two levels. On the surface, it is simply a story, and anyone can read it as such and be satisfied. Even children can read it.

But the simple characters and events of the surface may stand for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(or symbolize) other subtler things. Below the surface, therefore, there may be hidden and deeper meanings that children and unsophisticated adults don't see. Those who can see the inner structure, however, can get a double pleasure out of it. First, since the inner structure is usually cleverer and more convoluted than the surface, it exercises the mind more pleasantly. Second, since it is not easy to detect, the reader has the excitement of discovery and the pleasure of admiring his own cleverness. (You can easily imagine what fun the writer has constructing such symbolic significance.)

I suppose the best example of something written on two levels is the pair of books popularly known as *Alice in Wonderland*. On the surface, it's a simply-written fantasy, and children love it. Some adults reading it, however, find themselves in an intricate maze of puns, paradoxes, and inside jokes. (Read Martin Gardner's *The Annotated Alice*, if you want to increase your pleasure in the book.)

Or take J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. On the surface, it is a simple tale of a dangerous quest. The small hobbit, Frodo, must take a dangerous ring into the very teeth of an all-powerful enemy and destroy it—and, of course, he succeeds. On a second, deeper level, it is an allegory of good and evil, leading us to accept the possibility that the small and weak can triumph where the (equally good) large and powerful

ISAAC ASIMOV:
Editorial Director
SHAWNA McCARTHY:
Editor
SHEILA WILLIAMS:
Associate Editor
RALPH RUBINO:
Corporate Art Director
GERRY HAWKINS:
Associate Art Director
TERRI CZECZKO:
Art Editor
MARIANNE WELDON:
Associate Designer
CARL BARTEE:
Director of Manufacturing
CAROLE DIXON:
Production Manager
LAUREN C. COUNCIL:
Production Assistant
CYNTHIA MANSON:
Subsidiary Rights Manager
BARBARA BAZYN:
Permissions & Contracts Manager
MICHAEL DILLON:
Circulation Director Retail Marketing
JAY BRESNEHAN:
Circulation Planning Director
PRISCILLA GARSTON:
Circulation Manager Subscriptions
WILLIAM F. BATTISTA:
Advertising Director
JAMIE FILLON:
Advertising Manager
IRENE BOZOKI:
Classified Advertising Manager

ADVERTISING OFFICES
NEW YORK
(212) 557-9100

JOEL DAVIS
President and Publisher

LEONARD F. PINTO
Vice President
&
General Manager

PAULA COLLINS
Vice President
Circulation

FRED EDINGER
Vice President
Finance

Please do not send us your manuscript until you've gotten a copy of our manuscript guidelines. To obtain this, send us a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope), and a note requesting this information. The address for this and for all editorial correspondence is *IAsfm*, Davis Publications, Inc. 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. While we're always looking for new writers, please, in the interest of time-saving, find out what we're looking for, and how to prepare it, before submitting your story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

might not; that even evil has its uses that contribute to the victory of the good, and so on.

But there is a third level, too. What *is* the ring that is so powerful and yet so evil? Why is it that those who possess it are corrupted by it and cannot give it up? Is such a thing pure fantasy or does it have an analog in reality?

My own feeling is that the ring represents modern technology. This corrupts and destroys society (in Tolkien's views) and, yet, those societies who gain it and who are aware of its evils simply cannot give it up. I have read *The Lord of the Rings* five times, so far, and I have not yet exhausted my own symbolic reading of it. I do not agree with, and I resent, Tolkien's attitude and yet I get pleasure out of the intricacy and skill of the structure.

There is another important point to be made concerning symbolism.

A writer may insert it, without knowing he has done so; or else, a clever interpreter can find significance in various parts of a story that a writer will swear he had no intention of inserting.

This has happened to me, for instance. The middle portion of my novel *The Gods Themselves*, with its intricate picture of a trisexual society, has been interpreted psychiatrically and philosophically in ways that I *know* I didn't intend, and in terms that I literally don't understand. My *Foundation Series* has been shown, by apparently careful analysis, to be thoroughly Marxist in inspiration, except that I have never read one word by Marx, or about Marx either, at the time the stories were written, or since.

When I complained once to someone who worked up a symbolic meaning of my story "Nightfall" that made no sense to me at all, he said to me, haughtily, "What makes you think you understand the story just because you've written it?"

And when I published an essay in which I maintained that Tolkien's Ring symbolized modern technology, and a reader wrote to tell me that Tolkien himself had denied it, I responded with, "That doesn't matter. The Ring nevertheless symbolizes modern technology."

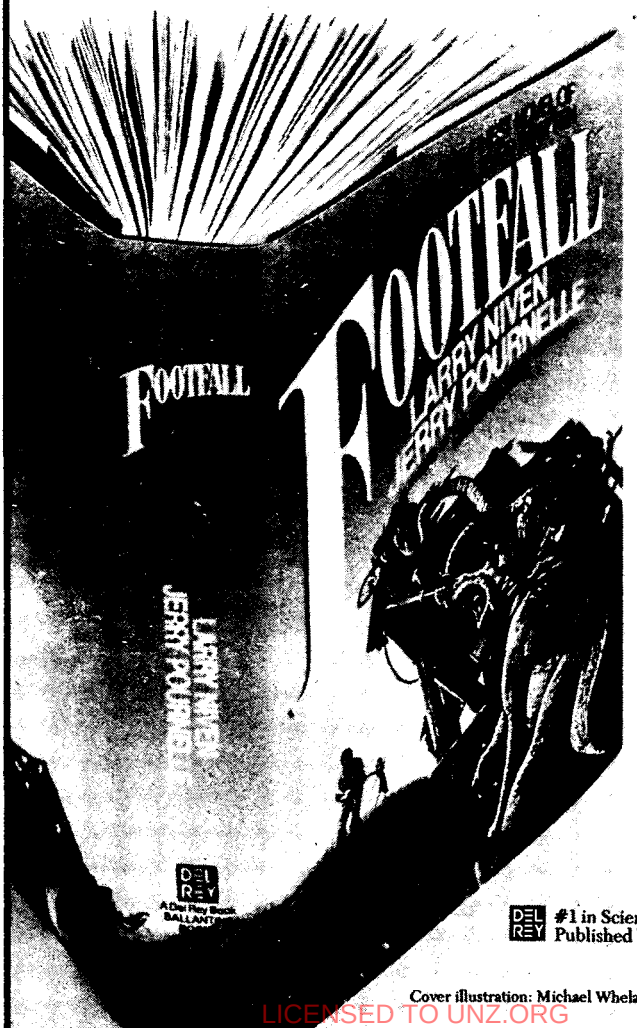
Sometimes it is quite demonstrable that an author inserts a deeper symbolism than he knows—or even understands. I have almost never read a layman's explanation of relativity that didn't succumb to the temptation of quoting *Alice* because Lewis Carroll included paradoxes that are unmistakably relativistic in nature. He did not know that, of course; he just happened to be a genius at paradox.

Well, sometimes this magazine publishes stories that must not be read only on the surface, and, as is almost inevitable, this riles a number of readers.

I am thinking, for instance, of the novella, "Statues" by Jim Aikin, which appeared in our November, 1984, issue, and which some readers objected to strenuously. There

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Probably the finest novel of alien invasion ever written!



"I LIKE *FOOTFALL* BECAUSE I LIKE A GOOD ONE-FASHIONED INVADER-FROM-SPACE STORY, WITH NOBLE AND IGNOBLE EARTHLINGS SCRAMBLING FOR COVER."
—John D. MacDonald

"NIVEN AND POURNELLE HAVE PRODUCED ANOTHER WORLD-IN-PERIL WONDER... I LOVED IT!"
—Frank Herbert

On sale in June
$17.95 Hardcover

DEL REY #1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy
Published by Ballantine Books

Cover illustration: Michael Whelan

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were statements to the effect that it wasn't science fiction or even fantasy, that it had no point, that it was anti-Christian, and so on.

To begin with, the story, taken simply as a story, is undoubtedly unpleasant in spots. I winced several times when I read it, and I tell you, right now, that I wouldn't, and couldn't, write such a story. But I'm not the be-all and the end-all. The story, however difficult to stomach some of its passages may be, was skillfully and powerfully written. Even some of those who objected had to admit that.

And it was indeed a fantasy. Aikin made it clear toward the end that the statues were not pushed about, and that their apparent movement was not a delusion. They were on the side of the heroine and were cooperating with her, trying to rescue her from her unhappy life.

But that is only the surface. A little deeper and we see that it is a case of the old gods trying to save the young woman from the new. It is a rebellion against the rigid Pharisaic morality of some aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition and a harking back to the greater freedom of some aspects of paganism. The story is in the spirit of that powerful line of A. C. Swinburne in his "Hymn to Proserpine,"—"Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown gray from thy breath."

Looked at this way, the story is not anti-Christian (surely the "Christian" characters in the story are not all there is to Christianity), but is against hypocrisy-in-the-name-of-religion, which I imagine no one favors, least of all Christians. The great French dramatist Moliere took up his cudgels against that same foe in his masterpiece "Tartuffe" and you can't imagine the trouble he got into as a result.

But if you go deeper still, you will find the story is one more expression of the longing for the old. In this story it is expressed by contrasting the frowning new god with the kindly old ones. In *The Lord of the Rings* it is expressed by contrasting the evil technology of the Dark Lord, Sauron, with the pastoral life of the simple hobbits. (Of course, it is much safer to make of the enemy a Devil-figure than a God-figure, so Tolkien got into no trouble at all.)

You can see the value of symbolism, when you compare either of these with Jack Finney's famous "The Third Level," where he demonstrates his longing for the old by a straightforward contrast between 1950 and 1880. It leaves nothing to discover and, in my opinion, therefore, is a weak story.

But "Statues"—like it or not—is a *strong* story that makes an important point with great skill. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BIO OF A SPACE TYRANT
VOLUME III: POLITICIAN.

by Piers Anthony

The space saga continues...Fueled by fury and a quest for social reform...His rise to power promises to ensure Jupiter's future. But his fall from political titan to political prisoner threatens to obliterate any trace of his destiny.

Politician. Volume III *in Piers Anthony's epic series,* Bio of a Space Tyrant. *Superb science fiction from a master storyteller.*

An **AVON** Paperback Original. $2.95 Can. $3.95

1985 Avon Books/The Hearst Corporation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LETTERS

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I have just finished the November issue of *I.A.'s Science Fiction*. Unfortunately, it was a real downer, and at last I am forced to write to say why the arrival of your magazine is no longer the pleasure it once was (and as a first issue subscriber, perhaps I speak from experience).

What happened to the fun? Dr. Asimov's name invokes a sense of light-heartedness with a solid core of scientific and human knowledge. I looked forward to thought-provoking stories of human/other beings in strange situations whether encased in fantasy or "hard" science fiction. Sex is always part of the human condition and violence as well, but I don't need to see bared genitalia or wade through severed body parts to have this message come across.

In other words, I am sick of all the blood. In this November issue, I see two brutalized real/pseudo children along with an adult reliving child abuse in "Lazuli"; a raped, beaten, aborted young woman in "Statues"; and a brutalized, beaten, brain-drained friend/lover amid a veritable ocean of similarly used people in "End Cruise." Science fiction becomes a faint echo in these stories. Suffering and savagery are the real themes.

But this is relevant, someone might say. This reflects the real world whose newspapers scream such horrors at us every day. No one should have a quiet, contemplative haven once a month when the world has such problems. Instead we should be moved by fiction as well as fact to correct these monstrous injustices. Who am I to debate this assumption? I only know I'm willing to pay for newspapers to confront reality and decide how to help; I'm not willing to pay to be further deluged in gore for relaxation.

But these are the themes that young writers are passionately interested in, and this is the material that comes in, someone might add. However, all hopeful-of-publication writers are told to read back issues of a publication to know what the editors want. If what they see is massive amounts of this type of suffering victim fiction, many writers will be tempted to slant their own work and throw in more sadism and gore to have more ready acceptance. Too bad.

Whew! Got that off my mind. As an old fuddy-duddy who's been reading science fiction from the pulps in the late 40's to today's dragon flights and *2010*, I still enjoy it. I don't envy Ms McCarthy's and your job—too difficult for most

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TWILIGHT: 2000

A Major New Role-Playing Challenge: *Survival in a War-Torn World*

Welcome to 2000 AD. World War III began five years ago. It's still going on, but that's the least of your problems. A few days ago, you were soldiers in the U.S. 5th Division. Now you're just fighting to survive.

Your equipment was brand new in 1995; now it's wearing out. Gasoline is rare, so your vehicles run on alcohol you distill yourself. And 5th Division's cavalry—when there was a 5th Division—rode horses. There's not much government left, just warlords, marauders, and free cities. Even the major powers are collapsing; whole divisions are refusing orders and heading home.

Your division is gone, and you're hundreds of kilometers inside enemy territory; fortunately, the Soviets aren't in much better shape than you are.

Your job is to stay alive, find enough fuel and spare parts to keep moving, get home (wherever that is), and maybe even strike at the enemy.

Twilight: 2000 is a major new roleplaying game, with new systems covering combat (from hands to tanks), skills and tasks, survival, encounters and NPC motives, and a great variety of equipment. It also contains extensive background information on the war and the current state of central Europe.

$18 at your local hobby shop or direct from GDW. (Add $1 for handling.) Send $1 for our catalog.

GDW Game Designers' Workshop
P.O. Box 1646
Bloomington, Illinois 61702-1646

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people. However, I felt I must give the opinion of one long-time science fiction fan.
Sincerely,

Joy Wideburg
2704 Cheyenne Road
Waukegan, IL 60087

You certainly present both sides of the argument effectively. There's one point you left out, however. The great novels of the past, that still live today, amply picture human misery and were criticized in their own time for upsetting people. I imagine that many writers dream of writing something great and enduring and are not satisfied, therefore, to be writing merely boy-gets-spaceship romances.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Doctor, Friends and Associates:

I have never, ever written a letter to a publication or a news column before this. But today I *had* to!

Thank you for printing the story "Lazuli"!!

Never, since "Enemy Mine," have I been more involved, more caught up with plot and emotional involvement in any story you have printed. (The Dear Doctor's "Lije Baley" and "Foundation" series excepted, of course!)

So to those who would ever say that "Science Fiction" shouldn't deal with current social problems (and, hopefully, their solutions), all I can say is, "Thank Goodness!! Dr. Asimov always has!!"

"Lazuli" deals with a particularly sensitive topic—incest—in a singularly non-threatening yet intense manner which can't help but have an impact on anyone who reads it . . . child or adult! I only wish that *I.A.* had a wider circulation so that this (as well as all your other fabulous stories) could be shared by everyone!

I don't expect you to print this . . . I just wanted to let you know how I feel.
Yours,

Vivian Peterson Barito
Centerport, NY

P.S. My son (age 18) has a subscription to *IAsfm* and we fight all the time over who gets to read it first!!! The next thing he read after the Encyclopaedia Britannica (at age 2½) was anything he could lay his hands on printed with the name Isaac Asimov on it. Between us I think we have read everything the "Good Doctor" has ever written.

I hate to think of a mother and son coming to blows over trifles. Why not each *get a subscription?*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear *IAsfm* Crew,

Once again we read the sad litany of a youngster being discouraged from/ridiculed for reading SF (Daniels letter, Nov '84).

I find it interesting that this oft-repeated phenomenon is so frequently set in that (self-styled) center of cosmopolitan enlightenment: New York City.

Now, I was raised in the benighted hinterlands, the backward and provincial Midwest (Kansas City, Kansas). It was there, about 40 years ago, that I was introduced to SF, by a math and chemistry

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teacher. It was also there that I received an A in 9th grade English Composition for an out-and-out SF adventure, à la Heinlein. I do not recall ever being criticized for reading SF (although there were some classmates who were very dubious about anyone who voluntarily read books of any sort).

Interesting contrast. I wonder if either anecdote is truly typical of its locale. Care to sponsor a poll of reader experience, to be analyzed on a geographic basis?

Sincerely,

Clyde A. Wilkes
Brentwood, MO

P.S. I have been an Asimov fan for the entire (can it be that long?) 40 years.

As we all know: everything's up to date in Kansas City; they've gone about as far as they can go.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editors,

I have been reading *IAsfm* since issue #1 and have been a subscriber for the past several years. It has been not only interesting but also delightful to watch it evolve into the excellent publication that it is today. This is not to imply that it has just recently become excellent—only that it has evolved.

I can truly say that I enjoy all portions of the magazine, not just one or the other. An important part of any magazine of broad readership is the "Letters To The Editor" department and I often get a kick (both positive and negative) out of what the other readers say. I have noticed a number of letters from readers who dislike one or another department of the magazine: Gaming, Mooney's Module, the (now defunct) crossword puzzle, even the Classified Market Place. Others deplore the amount of fantasy which appears between your covers.

My purpose in writing is twofold. First, I feel that you should leave all the departments as they are, concentrating of course on the stories, the central theme of *IAsfm*. Keep a bit of fantasy mixed in, too; "one man's meat . . ." The line between SF and Fantasy is often blurred at best and many of us read both and demand from both the same rigorous consistency. To my mind a good story is a good story no matter the branch of the literary tree on which it resides.

Second, I suggest, at the risk of committing heresy in some fans' eyes, the addition of yet another department. Every SF magazine has a book review column but I would like to see a column devoted to the visual media. Movies with SF themes have been with us since the first silent films. Many of them have only rated a thrown tomato. However there have been some very good, serious films made; films which have used SF settings to comment on social, political, or other "non-hardware" subjects. These films have often been well scripted and acted, starring first rate performers. There appeared to be a bit of a hiatus in "good" SF films in the 1970's—or did I just miss them? In the late 70's the "hardware" films depending only on the new and spectacular capacity developed in Hollywood for special effects began to appear. Some of them were an embarrassment to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

those of us who took our SF seriously. Of late there seems to be a trend to return to characterization and plot in these movies and I for one applaud it. There are, however, a fairly large number of films being produced and some mechanism for getting reviews to the community of SF fans may be a nice addition to your publication.

I recognize several problems with the proposal of a visual media review column. One is space: you are obviously limited in that important commodity. Another is timeliness of the reviews. By the time of the publication of the review column the movie would have come to and gone from smaller cities like Durham and the utility of the review would be lost to those of us living here or in similar settings. Books do not suffer from the short-term availability problem. I still say it would be useful, though, if a way could be found to overcome the apparent obstacles. Maybe a last minute attachment of an extra printed page to the inside cover? Comments?

While I have only been talking about movies, I started out using the term "visual media" purposely, as theater films are not the only visual SF form. There is, of course, television. TV would have two distinctly different forms of SF programming: series and special events, including the "made for television" movies. While I think a review of a series, should one appear, may be useful, I doubt it. Again, by the time the review appeared most of those interested probably would have seen the series and made up their own minds about it. As for TV movies, there would be little chance of publishing a review before the event. So why use "visual media" if I limit it to theater films? The answer is simple: other forms of visual entertainment certainly will be developed in the future. It may even be that videotape players are already widespread enough that a product developed to be solely available on videotape could be profitable. Such a product could become the comic books (a perhaps less pejorative term than "comic books" might be "serial publication") of the future or a form of magazine. It could even replace a large part of the commercial television industry as it is today. It would afford the viewer an opportunity to choose from a wider variety of subject matter and content than is now available, even on the cable systems. Using the stated economic theories of the current US Administration, the broader the market base for this product, the greater the competition and the lower the price would become, thus making it more likely that the market base would broaden further, insuring its profitability and thus its expanded development.

Enough for now; keep up the good work, yours is one of the few magazines I make time to read.

Michael T. Burke
Durham, NC

Ideally review columns are guides to the reader. The New York Times *reviews TV programs now the morning before the night on which they appear. They review movies the morning after the first showing. In both cases, the reader who is enticed by the review into wanting to see the*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

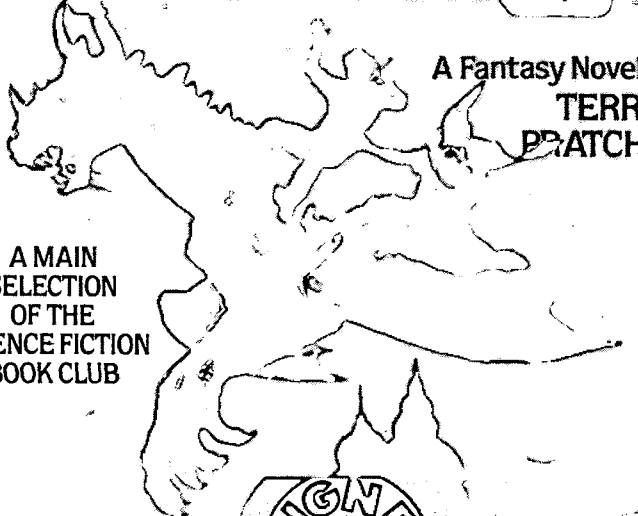
"There is no end to the wacky wonders... no fantasies as consistently, inventively mad... wild and wonderful." —*Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*

Terry Pratchett takes on the entire realm of fantasy in this wonderful, light-hearted spoof about a naive interplanetary tourist who joins up with a drop-out wizard whose spells work only half of the time.

Together they undertake a chaotic voyage through a crazy world filled with vicious trolls, irate dryads, sexy dragonladies, soul-eating gods, heroes, knaves... everyone and everything that could possibly exist in the wildest realms of the imagination! $2.95

THE COLOUR OF MAGIC

A Fantasy Novel by TERRY PRATCHETT



A MAIN SELECTION OF THE SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB

SIGNET FANTASY

LICENSED TO NZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

item reviewed can do so. As you say, the movies and TV programs would be unavailable by the time we reviewed them and we would only be recording history.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

What the blazes is going on here?!!? When did you change the name of your magazine to "Isaac Asimov's Not Necessarily Science Fiction Magazine"?

I am, of course, referring to the story "Statues" by Jim Aikin, published in the November 1984 issue. Is it a good story? Yes. Is it well-written? Yes. Is it SCIENCE FICTION??????

No.

So why was it published in your magazine? It isn't even Fantasy!!! Now we all know that this isn't the first time you've accepted a manuscript that doesn't even come close to falling under the heading Science Fiction. What most of your readers probably wonder is why this has occurred too frequently to be dismissed as a mere policy oversight. Didn't anyone along the line stop and ask themselves if this story was Science Fiction?

If it is to be your practice to allow these kinds of stories to be published, I would suggest that you change the name of *IAsfm* so as not to mislead us devoted subscribers to Science Fiction magazines.

John Jackson
Carmichael, CA

I'm glad you think "Statues" was a good story and well-written. It was also a fantasy. We are broad in our definition of science fiction and we place the boundaries wide.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy

I am one of the younger readers of the *Asimov Science Fiction Magazine*. I am fifteen years old, and enjoy the magazine immensely. Recently I renewed my subscription, and received *Space of Her Own*, Science Fiction Anthology #8. It was the first I had heard of an Asimov anthology.

I am now half-way through the anthology, and already my opinion of the collection is quite high. What I would like to know is why the anthologies are kept so secret! I have never seen a reference to them in *Iasfm*, nor have I seen them on the shelf of my local Lincoln bookstore. Therefore, I would very much appreciate it if you would send me some information as to where I can buy more of these wonderful books.

In the meantime, keep up the excellent work you have been doing on my favorite source of science fiction! *(Iasfm)* Maybe someday one of my crude attempts at writing will see print on its pages. Until then, give my regards to the Doctor. (I am currently in the middle of book three of the Foundation series, which I daren't praise too highly for fear of inflating his ego and risking sounding repetitious.) Thank you for saving me from many hours of boredom* (not to mention wading through the correction fluid this far).

Kim Surkan
Lincoln, NE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MOONEY'S MODULE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*this refers to the time spent reading, a very attractive alternative to doing nothing.

I assure you that we don't intend to keep the anthologies so secret. It's just that we've got to do more than stand on the street corner and yell. To publicize the anthologies (or anything else) we must advertise —and that costs money, the supply of which is limited.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy & Dr. Asimov:

It seems that lately quite a few letters have been appearing protesting the sexual elements in some of the recent issues. I must say that I am astounded that such a lack of openmindedness could exist in the readers of an enlightened magazine such as yours. I have never found a single story to be offensive in any way and feel that any allegations of gratuitous sex or violence have been way off the mark.

For instance, in "Lazuli," the implications of incestuous sex are an integral part of the antagonist's underlying psychological currents. This element, although perhaps unsavory, lends unquestionable power to *every* character's motivations. Without it, the father's abuses would've been much more hollow and the other characters' reactions much less potent and emotionally driven. To limit either an editor or author to arbitrary bounds of "good taste" would be to remove much of the dramatic power in these stories. I for one trust both you and the authors you select to implicitly know what is gratuitous and what is not.

I congratulate you on a magazine of true literary strength, and your steadfast position against unnecessary censorship demands from a small segment of your readers. Please realize that most of us out here have nothing but the utmost respect and admiration for your "good taste" and judgment. I know *my* subscription will never lapse!

Elizabeth Shaw (form. Herrick)
Burton, MI

It is difficult to legislate standards of good taste, and we must, on this point, agree to disagree to a certain extent. For instance, Vice-President Bush uses language I would not, but I wouldn't care to try to get him to wash his mouth out with soap. We are forced therefore to rely on Shawna to weigh the different aspects of a story and decide whether to publish it or not.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

As I read your magazine, I hear people complain that there is not enough science fiction and too much fantasy. Personally, I think there could be a little more science fiction printed within the covers of *IAsfm*. But if the magazine was filled with strictly science fiction, it would get boring. The editors would have problems finding enough stories and some of those stories would not fit *IAsfm's* standards of excellence.

I have never run across an article in your magazine that I haven't liked. I like the variety of fantasy mixed with science fiction. Science fiction has to include some fantasy, and actually there isn't a clear difference between the two.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Keep up the good work because I'm not the only one who loves your magazine. In fact, I hardly ever get to see mine. My friends in school also like science fiction and are constantly borrowing my *IAsfm*'s. Pretty soon I'm going to tell them to get their own subscriptions.

Shelley Bennett
Waterford, PA

Good! Tell them to get subscriptions as soon as you can. Explain that subscriptions are the life-blood of the magazine and if they enjoy the contents and want the issues to keep coming down through the centuries ad infinitum, *subscriptions are the things to get.*

—Isaac Asimov

WAVERING

"I'm listening, yes I really am absorbing the complexities of
computer logic and logarithms. See my intense look of concentration . . ."

as the waves roll in, roaring in approach, hissing in recession. The sand sparkles beneath my feet and I am walking among stars and—

"Yes, this particular subroutine passes the wrong parameter
and now the program should be re-compiled and re-linked.
But the I/O file is random access and . . ."

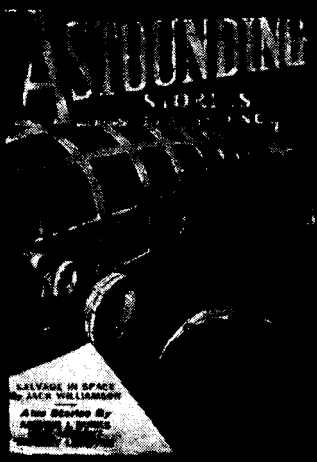
the sound of the surf grows louder and louder as the long
heavy swells thunder toward the shore. The wind unfurls the waves to bring a fragrant mist of things I cannot see.

". . . the array is out of bounds. What about this undefined variable? Oh sure I remember—why?"

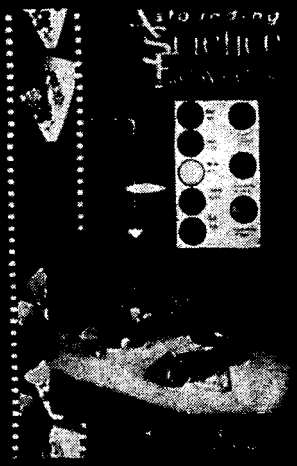
are the seagulls racing the sea? They can only be tossed like the pebbles and shells but the waves, the waves are swift and free.

—Karin C. Warren

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

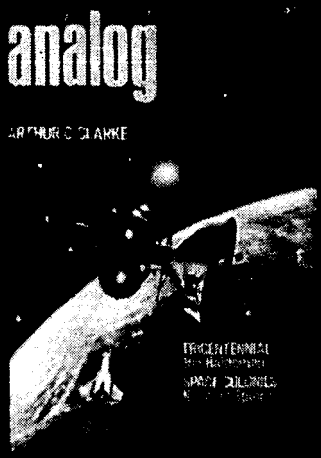


MARCH 1933



FEBRUARY 1960

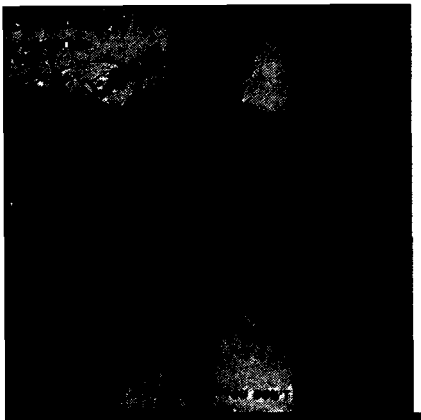
NOVEMBER 1964



JULY 1976

641 BACK ISSUES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Editor's Page
Science Fiction Prophecy
Isaac Asimov
. . . And Now You Don't
Lester del Rey
Over The Top
Robert A. Heinlein
Gulf
A. E. van Vogt
Final Command
R. S. Richardson
The Time Of Your Life
Theodore Sturgeon
What Dead Men Tell
L. Sprague de Camp
Finished

NOVEMBER 1949

CONTENTS

FREE on request you can receive a copy of the November 1949 issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*.. ***WHY?*** Because it is a **very high quality** microfiche edition that you need to see to believe! Microfiche (film), written about as **science fiction** for years, is now **science fact**. With your FREE copy of *Astounding Science Fiction* (at no obligation) comes complete information on how you can obtain all 641 back issues of *Astounding/Analog* from 1930 through 1984. Also available is a **250 page index, covers in color microfiche,** and **desk/bedside reader/projectors.** Why wait? Find out about this remarkable collection today.

YES, I want more information about back issues in Microfiche & free copy of Astounding.

NOTE: Detach & mail OR request on a separate sheet.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

M.I.C., P.O. Box 2163, Dept. H, Dallas, TX 75221

214-824-3969

MICRO INFORMATION CONCEPTS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

How many times have you been asked to recommend a good science fiction or fantasy game for someone who's never played this type of game before? The following list of games includes SF and fantasy titles that are very good for beginners. Games noted as "Second Level" types are designs slightly more advanced than beginner's games, but suitable for people with only limited experience with SF and fantasy games.

Beginner's Games

Title: *Combots*
Publisher: FASA Corp.
Description: You "build" your own gladiator robot, then compete with it in the arena. Excellent metal miniatures of robots with interchangeable parts come in the game.
Solitaire Rating: Good

Title: *Cosmic Encounter*
Publisher: West End Games Inc.
Description: Each player in this very different card game represents an alien. Each alien has unique abilities that affect play.
Solitaire Rating: Poor

Title: *Dragonriders of Pern*
Publisher: Nova Game Designs Inc.
Description: A "picture book" game; each player has his own book (no board or cards are used to play). You must *cooperate* with the other player to destroy "thread" with your fire-breathing, flying dragon. Based on Anne McCaffrey's novels.
Solitaire Rating: Poor

Title: *Endless Quest Books*
Publisher: TSR Inc.
Description: Each paperback book is a complete solitaire fantasy adventure, incorporating the features of role-playing.
Solitaire Rating: Very Good

Title: *Fighting Fantasy Books*
Publisher: Dell/Laurel Leaf
Description: Heroic fantasy is the storyline for these paperback solitaire game books.
Solitaire Rating: Very Good

Title: *Nuclear War/Nuclear Escalation*
Publisher: Blade/Flying Buffalo Inc.
Description: These two card games can be played by themselves, or joined together for one giant "nuke." Great satire.
Solitaire Rating: Poor (it's better to glow together)

Title: *Ogre*
Publisher: Steve Jackson Games Inc.
Description: In this war game, supertanks (including the dreaded giant "Ogre") battle in Earth's near future.
Solitaire Rating: Good

Title: *Sanctuary*
Publisher: Mayfair Games Inc.
Description: You play a thief, avoid the king's guards, and try to become the richest player in this board game based on Robert Asprin's novels about a city of thieves.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Solitaire Rating: Good

Title: *Star Commander*
Publisher: Historical Concepts
Description: You "build" your space vessels (and try to sabotage your opponent's fleet), then attack with your starships in this unique card game.
Solitaire Rating: Fair

Title: *Star Fire*
Publisher: Task Force Games
Description: This is a simpler version of Task Force's popular *Star Fleet Battles* game about tactical starship combat.
Solitaire Rating: Fair

Title: *Star Trek: The Role-Playing Game*
Publisher: FASA Corp.
Description: You participate in the famous television and movie series as a member of Star Fleet Command.
Solitaire Rating: Poor

Title: *Talisman*
Publisher: Games Workshop U.S.
Description: A board game that incorporates many elements of fantasy role-playing. Your character must travel to the center of the board and seize the "crown of power."
Solitaire Rating: Good

Second Level Games

Title: *Battledroids*
Publisher: FASA Corp.
Description: Robots battle each other in Earth's future. Nice plastic robot models are included with the game.
Solitaire Rating: Good

Title: *Dungeons & Dragons® (Basic)*
Publisher: TSR Inc.
Description: The original heroic fantasy role-playing game, first published in late 1974.
Solitaire Rating: Poor

Title: *Hammer's Slammers*
Publisher: Mayfair Games Inc.
Description: A war game about mercenary tank battles, based on the novel by David Drake.
Solitaire Rating: Good

Title: *Lost Worlds Series*
Publisher: Nova Game Designs Inc.
Description: Each book in the series is a different fantasy fighter (elf, amazon, unicorn, etc.). You "sword fight" using the book showing your *opponent's* position.
Solitaire Rating: Poor

Title: *Paranoia*
Publisher: West End Games Inc.
Description: A role-playing game about a mad computer that thinks everyone in a future underground community is out to "get" it.
Solitaire Rating: Fair

Title: *Star Trek III: Starship Duel*
Publisher: FASA Corp.
Description: A combat "wheel" is used instead of a board or a book to show each starship and its enemy's location.
Solitaire Rating: Poor

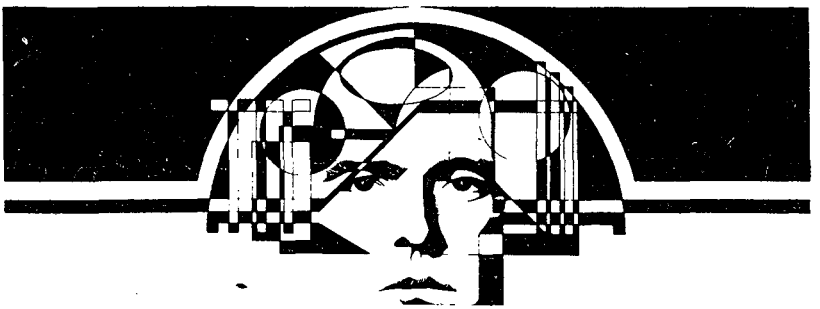
Title: *Traveller®*
Publisher: Game Designers' Workshop
Description: A role-playing game about pirates, bootleggers, and mercenaries in space.
Solitaire Rating: Poor

For more details on these games, visit your local game store. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARTIN GARDNER

ANIMAL TTT



If you don't know about polyominoes you are missing one of the most intriguing fields of modern recreational mathematics. Arthur Clarke became so fascinated by them that he put them into his novel *Imperial Earth* as symbols of the combinatorial possibilities of life. In his recent book *Ascent to Orbit* you'll find a chapter titled "Help! I Am a Pentomino Addict!" Remember the chess game played by HAL, the computer in Clarke's film *2001*? This was first filmed as a pentomino game, but for various reasons was later changed to chess.

Pentominoes are a species of polyomino. A polyomino? It is a structure made of unit squares joined along their sides. A single square is called a monomino. Two make a domino. Three join in two different ways to make two trominoes. Four join to make five trominoes, and there are twelve different pentominoes of five squares each. The terminology was invented by Professor S. W. Golomb, of the University of Southern California, who was the first to study polyominoes in depth. He has written an entire book titled *Polyominoes* (1965), unfortunately no longer in print. He has copyrighted the name *pentomino*.

Is there a formula that gives at once the number of different n-ominoes for every n? No, this is one of the most intractable problems in combinatorial geometry. The best computer algorithms for enumerating all the polyominoes for a given n are recursive—they first determine all the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

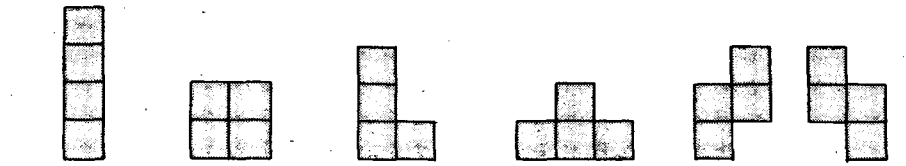
polyominoes for $n - 1$ before they go on to n. No one has yet discovered a nonrecursive formula.

Frank Harary, a famous graph theorist at the University of Michigan, likes to think of polyominoes as n-celled "animals." Most polyomino problems involve forming patterns with a given set of animals, but in the past few years Harary has invented a bewildering variety of simple games with these animals that are great fun to play. Some of the games raise deep combinatorial questions not yet answered.

The games are played on paper like ticktacktoe (TTT). The basic idea is for two players to take turns marking the cells of a square matrix with naughts and crosses, but instead of trying to get three of their marks in a row, they try to form a specified animal. Each game has its reverse form—Harary calls it an avoidance game—in which the first to form the animal *loses*. Avoidance games are usually much harder to analyze.

For example, assume that the game's animal is what Harary calls Tippy (see Figure 1), and that the game is played on an order-3 (three-

FIGURE 1

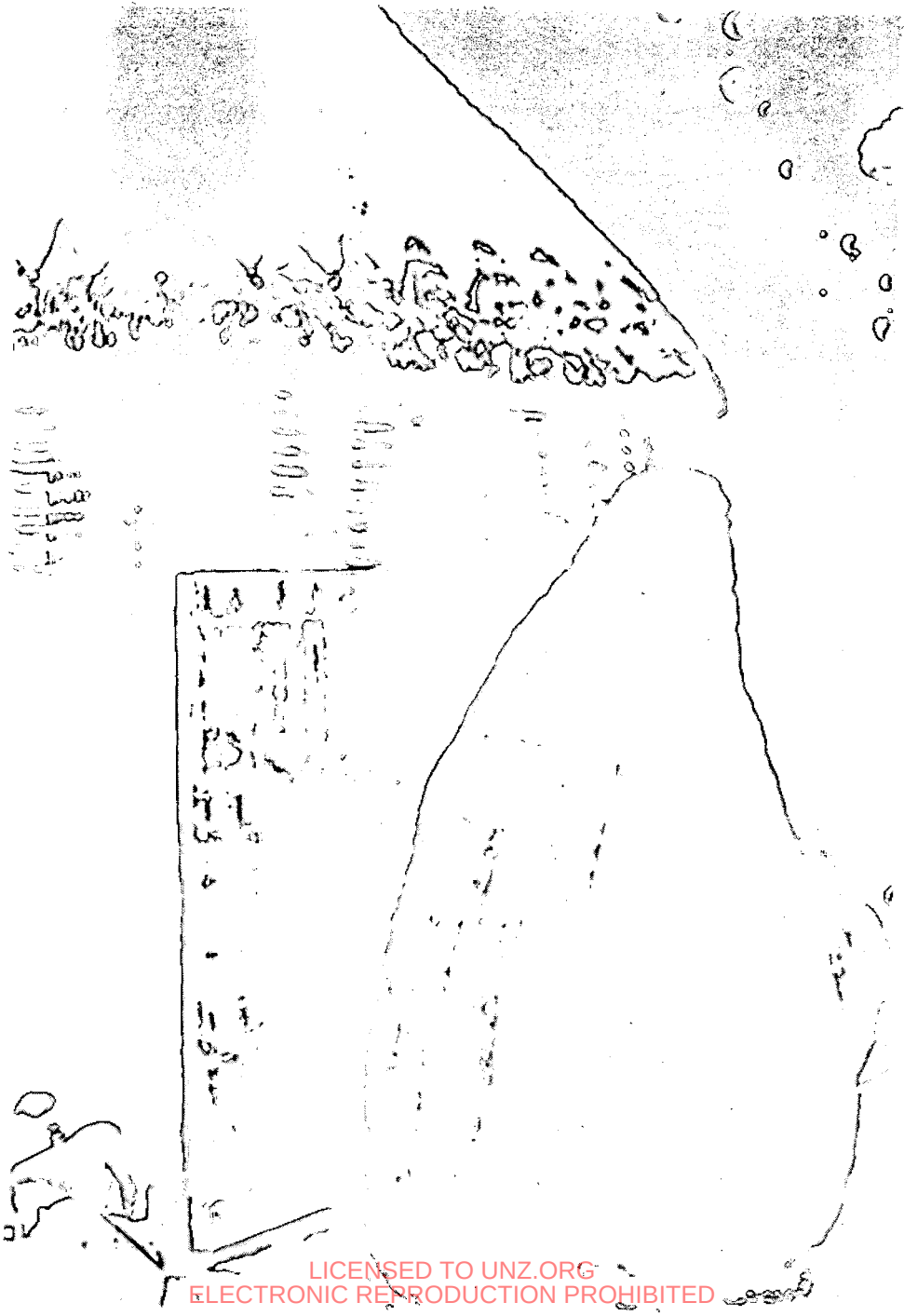


THE FIVE FOUR-CELL ANIMALS

by-three) square field. The first player to form Tippy, in either of its mirror-image forms, wins. When I first published this game in *Scientific American* in 1979, both Harary and I considered it a draw if both sides played rationally (their best), but Terence Martin, then a student of Harary at Ann Arbor, found a simple strategy by which the first player can always win.

You'll enjoy playing Tippy TTT with friends. See if you can discover the winning first-player strategy before you look at page 110.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TUNICATE, TUNICATE, WILT THOU BE MINE?

art: J.K. Potter

by Charles Sheffield

Charles Sheffield is vice president of Earth Satellite Corporation, president of the Science Fiction Writers of America, and past-president of the American Astronautical Society. Born in England and educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, he holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in Mathematics, and a Ph.D. in Theoretical Physics.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This has to be set down accurately, perfectly accurately; otherwise not one of you, whoever you are, will understand the truth—the truth about Master Tunicate, I mean, and why all the people died. I never expected to be the survivor—never *wanted* to be the survivor. But some choices you don't get to make.

If it were less noisy, maybe I could put everything onto the little tape recorder—it's here, with all Jane's blank tapes that she never used, and all the little spare batteries. But there's the roaring, and the drums, and the shaking, and the water, and tape recorders are terrible for picking up every bit of background noise. You wouldn't hear me at all.

So it will have to be Walter's notebook; and what is left out is left out.

All right.

So there we were, in the middle of Africa; and I defy you to find a more improbable quartet for an expedition. Walter, and Jane, and Wendy, and me, the terrible four. All of them such seasoned African travelers, and me a-gaping at everything I saw, and not knowing half the time if they were joking or not. Don't drink that water, Steven, they'd say. Don't eat the eggs and the bread. It was all a big joke. As Wendy used to say, the closest I had been to Africa was stories from mad Uncle George.

That's not the place to start. I can't handle that. Let's go back, back to the beginning. Let's try Washington, last December.

Winter came hard, and it came quickly. The Wednesday before Christmas it was like late fall. But on Christmas Eve, when we set off for Walter and Jane's place in Great Falls, we had eight inches of snow over an icy road. We went slithering and sliding along in the Toyota, not sure we would make it up the next hill, and every two minutes we talked of turning around and heading back home for Bethesda.

We kept going. Of course we did. Not all the animals are equal. For some friends we take ridiculous risks to keep a purely social appointment, for others Wendy or I would be on the phone making our apologies at the first sign of a snowflake.

We kept going, even though I knew we were heading for a three-hand evening with me playing dummy. They were all Africa freaks. We'd have dinner, then I would drink too much Harvey's, while the rest of them rattled on about Africa. Bloody Africa.

And when Walter told Wendy he had slides of his last trip, and that he had been to Zaire, did I complain? No. I even helped him set up the carousel projector—even though Zaire was just a name to me, along with Zambia and Zimbabwe, and all the other bloody zzz's like Zanzibar and Mozambique that filled up the middle of Africa. And I took the worst seat, with my back to the fire, so that after fifteen minutes I was roasted.

I'm not that obliging with everyone. Wendy could tell you that. When we went over last spring to see Sheila, one of Wendy's childhood friends,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and her husband, Max, and they started to show us slides of their last summer's trip to England, I'm proud to say that I fell asleep on the floor, in the middle of their exposition. They deserved it. "This is Westminster Abbey"—a dwarfed, out-of-focus shot of some anonymous building, with two hideous, grinning figures in the foreground. "This is Hadrian's Wall." A low, obscure something in the misty background, and the same two people. Sheila has a figure like a sack of potatoes, and Max's parents never heard of the word "orthodontist."

Let's be fair. Walter's slides weren't like that. He has an artist's eye, and he'd no more put himself in a picture than he'd photograph his bare bottom. And he's conscientious—was, *was*—about scale and focus. A pity. If he hadn't been, none of this would have started.

His slides were in strict logical order. He was doing a vegetation study for the World Bank, and he brought us inland from the coast, past a couple of hundred kilometers of white water rapids, to Kinshasa, where the Zaire River was broad and placid. Wendy kept up a running commentary on the soils and rock types, as a sort of counterpoint to Walter's botany. And after Jane noticed my glassy-eyed look, and explained to me that Zaire used to be called the Belgian Congo, and the river we were looking at used to be known as the Congo River, my old childhood geography lessons stirred in my brain and everything began to make sense to me as well.

Congo. Magic word. Just say it to yourself. Cong-go. It's the mightiest river in Africa. Don't you feel the primitive power of the word? Congo. Africa. Heart of darkness. Enough to make you shiver.

Perhaps I ought to explain how Wendy and I met. It may seem logical to you anyway, she a geologist and I a paleontologist. We could have run into each other while she was rock-hunting and I was digging up old bones. Logical, maybe, but quite wrong. I don't dig up old bones. I work for the Smithsonian, and I arrange exhibits, and I write learned papers on taxonomy, and I spend three hundred and sixty nights of the year in the same bed. I am what Wendy's family call a stick-at-homer, not quite to my face. They are all crazy, every one of them, and like mad Uncle George they swarm all over the world, looking for oil in the Java Sea or copper in southern Argentina. I'll say it again, they're all crazy.

But Wendy and I did meet, and not in the Gobi Desert. We met at the Kennedy Center, at a concert. My neighbor had a season ticket, and he couldn't attend, and Yo-yo Ma was playing the Dvorak Cello Concerto, which is one of my favorites. So that accounts for my presence. And Wendy was in the next seat, on a date with a new boyfriend who looked human but turned out to be a total prick. She suspected it at the beginning, during the *Overture to Die Meistersinger*, but the extent of his prickishness didn't fully emerge until he twice tried to grope her under

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cover of his jacket during the *adagio* of the concerto. The second time she riposted with a pair of nail scissors, and moved as close to me as the seat permitted.

I had noticed all this, and thought that she looked gorgeous, in a white flared skirt and a deep-pink blouse that was just right for her complexion and dark-brown hair. But I was somewhat preoccupied. It was late May, and I had terrible hay fever, with itchy eyes and streaming nose. I couldn't stop sniffling. And along the way I was actually trying to listen to the music. At the interval Wendy turned to me and asked if I would like to go out and have a drink with her during the intermission. I accepted, and she bought me an orange juice. She had to. I had left my wallet in the parking lot, on the front seat of my car. And it was orange juice because I was so full of antihistamines that alcohol would have put me out for the whole second half of the concert—Schubert's Ninth, another favorite.

When we got back to our seats pricko had departed, leaving Wendy without transportation. After a second half in which she still sat as close to me as the seat permitted, I drove her home to Sumner (good news: my wallet was still in the car). She lived alone in a two-bedroom house, and invited me in for an explicitly nonalcoholic and nonsexual nightcap. The house was filled with mementoes from her world travels—most of them hideous. I managed the nonalcohol, but I flunked the nonsex and eventually stayed the night. I think I made a big impression. I am sure that Wendy had had more skillful lovers, but never one whose nose ran all over her during lovemaking, the way that mine did.

Lovemaking.

Forgive me, Wendy. This is relevant, I have to tell it. But we relived and retold parts of that night a hundred times, when people asked how we met, and now when I write of it I cannot make it sound like more than a farce. My heart can break, but the words don't show it—*won't* show it. My poor Wendy, in an unmarked grave in eastern Zaire. We had a golden evening and night, but we could never reveal that side of it to others. It had to be told as a joke; and now I cannot describe it any other way.

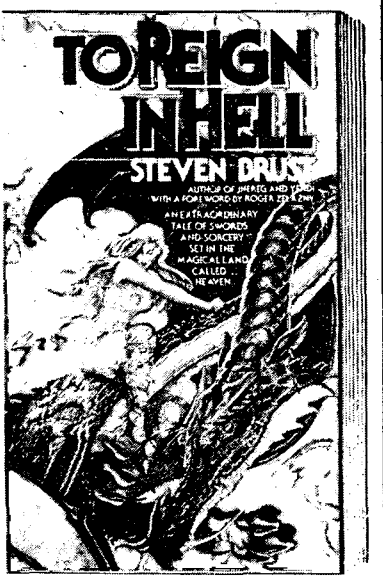
Do Wendy and I sound an improbable couple? Compared with Walter and Jane, we were a perfectly matched duo. For a start, he's about five eight, and she's maybe six one. Both beanpole thin. Forget that, and look at their personalities. You could drop Jane down in the middle of Hell, and she'd calmly begin to make plans for the best way out. If I had to be lost in the middle of nowhere with anyone in the world (and I was) it would be Jane. But not Walter. He suffers what Jane terms "cerebral omelettetitis." She says Africa without a hat had fried his brains. But he's an original thinker. Between them they could tackle anything.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wrede and Brust—the newest stars of fantasy

The magical harp of Lyra had been lost for centuries. And Emereck wished it had never been found—for all magic has its price, and the greater the magic, the greater the cost.
$2.95

Experience swords-and-sorcery at the beginning of time—in Heaven. It's a tale of intrigue, power and corruption, of monstrous transformations and magical battles that shake Creation.
$2.95



ACE FANTASY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anything . . . except Master Tunicate.

When he first put in an appearance I was already drowsing. Wine with dinner, then a port and four large sherries, with a wood fire at my back. I knew that Wendy was sober, and would drive us home. I didn't take much notice as Walter took us farther and farther east, heading towards the source of the river. He was well out of the territory he was supposed to cover for the World Bank, but what else was new? Now he was traveling on his own budget, for the sheer hell of it.

River life, and swamps, and native huts, and dense stands of forest. And then, without warning, something that made me sit up in my chair. Walter advanced the carousel to show a new slide. Two native women stood there, stone-faced, one on each side of a massive, lumpy sculpture. I swallowed that sculpture in one look. Too big for life. But so realistically carved that I marveled at the detail.

"Walter!" He had been ready to advance the carousel again when I stopped him. "Where in God's name did you take that picture?"

"Still awake, Steven? That's a first. Wait a minute." He switched on a table lamp to look at the notebook sitting next to the carousel. "I thought so. It was a little village called *Kintongo*, or *Kitongo*, I never saw it written down. What's the interest? We thought you were asleep."

Kintongo. Soon the whole world will know the name. But when Walter said it, the rest of us had never heard of it.

"Why the interest?" said Walter again. "I snapped the picture with a telephoto lens—mainly because the people in the village refused to be photographed. Otherwise I wouldn't have wasted the film."

"What's that thing in the middle, between the two women?" I'm sure my voice was shaky.

"That depends who you believe." Walter cleared his throat, and pushed back his floppy brown cowlick with his hand—I can see him do it now, as I sit here and write. "According to them, it's a god. According to me, it's a hollowed-out lump of wood. Not near as heavy as it looks."

"No trick photography? I mean, it really was that size."

"Certainly was. You know me, I always try to get something like a human, or a hand, or a car into the picture, to fix the scale. I had to wait a while until those two lovelies came out and stood in the right place. It's maybe seven feet tall, top to bottom. So what's all the excitement?"

"You didn't know it, but you photographed a tunicate."

Jane knows a lot of biology. She picked up on it at once. "Can't be. Steven, I'm ashamed of you. You know better—a tunicate's not a fraction of that size, ever. And you wouldn't find one in eastern Zaire."

I felt the curious frustration you get when you know fifty times as much about a subject as someone else, but don't want to take the time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to explain. I was a world's *expert* on tunicates, for Christ's sake—Jane was a smart amateur.

I didn't argue. Instead I said: "Walter, can you get that slide in sharper focus?"

"I doubt it. But I can do better than that. Hold on a minute, I'm sure to have an eight-by-ten print in the other room. What the hell's a tunicate anyway?" He left the room.

All the alcohol seemed to have burned out of me. "I know, Jane." I was almost stammering, and I felt short of breath. "I know. A tunicate, that far from the sea. And that size. A giant, fossil tunicate? Impossible, right. But if it's *not* impossible—it's a discovery. A *major* discovery."

I have to digress here. There's no way this can be told in any strict time sequence, anyway—not even in a *logical* sequence. So why try?

Life's a bummer. Don't laugh now, but I've probably spent ten thousand hours studying, reading about, and writing about tunicates, and chances are good that you've never even heard of them. But you have to understand them—well—if those dark later happenings at Kintongo are ever to make any sense to you. They make only limited sense to me.

Can we talk tunicates for a moment? Let me pursue that passion of mine one last time. It would be a waste of time to try to repeat exactly what I said that night to Walter and our wives. He'd been drinking pretty steadily, and he has a lot less body weight than me. Jane and Wendy caught on fast, but I had to repeat things three or four times before it got through to him.

We can go very quickly if you'll accept some shortcuts. Wouldn't do for the Smithsonian, but that's a million miles away.

One other thing. There will be an inquiry into all this—bound to be. There are other materials, exhibits that prove everything I'm going to say. But I couldn't bring them back with me. I'll tell you where they are hidden as we come to them.

Now, having promised to talk about tunicates I realize I can't afford to say it at all. Can't afford the space. I'm a fifth of the way through Walter's notebook and I've hardly begun.

It's all in other books, anyway—look in any decent zoology text, under 'Tunicata,' and you'll find pages about them. They are the most fascinating creatures in the world (or out of it?). Are they plants or animals? Terrestrial tunicates are animals, definitely; but in their adult form they usually root to the bottom of the sea like plants. Are they vertebrates or invertebrates? Somewhere in the middle, with a start of a backbone that never becomes one. And they have an outer skin, sort of an exoskeleton, made of *tunicin*; tunicin is very close to plant cellulose, the nearest the animal kingdom ever gets to producing it. They have a heart and a circulation system—but no oxygen-carrying pigment like hemo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

globin in the blood. What the blood *does* have is sulphuric acid; and vanadium, lots of it. They concentrate vanadium, but we don't know how or why. Sometimes they look to me more like inorganic factories than natural animals.

I didn't mean to start. It's all in the books, and time is short, space is short, the river is calm now, and the boat is going like hell. We'll be back at Kinshasa in a few hours. But I have to add one or two things more, because they are the central factors that brought us to Zaire and to Kintongo.

Size, and habitat. Tunicates don't get much bigger than a small melon, even the biggest species. And they live in the seas and oceans, never inland. But pictured on that slide I saw the remains of a huge tunicate, seven feet tall, a thousand miles from the nearest salt water. My suggestion of a giant, fossil tunicate was a desperate one. It was all I could think of. But I know the fossil forms, and they're small.

A fake? A practical joke, played on me by Walter, with the connivance of Wendy and Jane?

That's not as silly as it sounds. Wendy was my love and my soulmate. But that couldn't make us the same age as each other. Walter, Jane, and Wendy were contemporaries, in college together, and they've been conspiring for a long time. Although I was in college during those same years, I took a while getting there. I'm nine years older than the others. Cross-generation talk and little friendly surprises for old Steven are no new thing. They sound bad. But I liked them. They always had a nice outcome, and they made me feel like someone special.

This wasn't a fake. Walter produced the eight-by-ten and a lens, and we all had a close look. I explained what we were seeing.

Put your finger on that fifteen minute interval, if you want a starting point. One reason for getting together on Christmas Eve was to talk about next summer's vacation. We did it each year. Usually the other three would propose Kenya, or Madagascar, or Patagonia; I would counter with Rehoboth, or Atlantic City, or Long Beach Island. Mostly we settled for a middle ground, and went to the Yucatan, or Rio, or Bermuda. Good hotels, good food.

Passion outweighs logic.

This time—Great God forgive me—I spoke first. For our vacation I suggested eastern Zaire.

Witness the advantages of technology.

The others laughed at my ideas of how we would get to Kintongo. Steamboat and native bearers, I had asked.

"PanAm to Paris, then Air Zaire to Kinshasa," said Wendy.

"Air *Zaire*?"

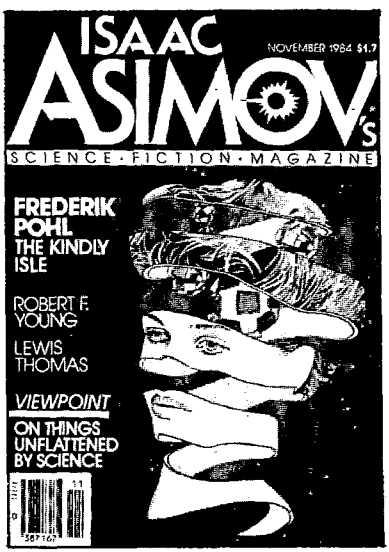
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

THIS YEAR ENTER ANOTHER DIMENSION.

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE UP TO 44% OFF THE COVER PRICE

CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-247-2160

(Iowa residents Call 1-800-362-2860)



YES SEND ME

☐ 8 Issues for only $11.97

☐ 18 Issues for only $19.97

ISAAC ASIMOV'S
SCIENCE · FICTION · MAGAZINE

P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43306

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue. Outside U.S. and possessions 8 issues for $14.97. 18 issues for $24.97. All foreign orders must be paid in advance in U.S. currency.

DSF5S

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sure. Seven-forty-seven—don't worry about it, American and British crew members. We won't eat the food, and last time I wasn't too keen on the state of the toilets, but that's a detail. We *could* fly Kinshasa to Stanleyville, or whatever they changed its name to."

"Kisangani," said Walter. "Get that right, Wendy, or they'll throw us all out of Zaire."

"Kisangani. But that's not as much fun as the water. We'll rent a diesel-powered shallow-draft boat and take it along the river as far as Boyoma Falls; then on by mini-bus to Kintongo."

"Piece of cake," said Jane. "I'll handle food supplies."

"And medical, too?" said Wendy. "I'll worry about visas and letters of introduction. Walter, will you cover transportation?"

"No problem. Just a rerun from last time. I've got all my old notes. We'll need a small trailer as well as the bus."

For a change there was no discussion of vacation choice. They were planning before I had thought through my own suggestion.

And the money for all this? Ah, there's the real magic of Wendy and Jane and Walter. Grant-masters, all three of them. They knew the pools where the grant money swims, and what baited words would let you reel it in.

Piece of cake.

Sure. In my excitement I believed it. I still believed it when we set out up-river from Kinshasa, aboard a thirty-two-foot twin-engined Messerschmitt launch that drew less than two feet of water.

I was excited but uneasy. Walter's slides were accurate, but some things they couldn't tell. They didn't capture the clouds of flies that chased us over the water—big flies, with a blue-black meaty body and a vicious bite. The slides couldn't catch the feeling of the river, either, broad and lazy and somehow infinitely old and powerful. Self-satisfied. It didn't notice us. When we have wiped ourselves out, or gone into space to meet our masters, that dark river will be there unchanged. I was afraid of it.

The flies annoyed, but they did not frighten—not then. They terrify me now. They are still here, there are scores of them in the cabin. I can stand them, but I dare not close my eyes. If I did, I would see again the three blue-black swarms, buzzing densely. And at the center, Walter; and Jane; and Wendy.

The boat was capable of eighteen knots, but we didn't try for more than a fraction of that. We pushed our way steadily upriver, with Walter at the helm and the three-man "crew" sitting on the hatch, smoking and chatting to each other. They seemed able to ignore the flies. Two of them still carried automatic rifles, holding them casually across their laps. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had started to object when we first boarded, but Walter had taken me to one side.

"This is a military dictatorship," he said quietly. "We're here because the President's office allows us visas and lets us be here. But they'll keep a close eye on us—and if they don't like what they see, we'll be out."

"But they're carrying guns. Are they loaded?"

"They're loaded. Get used to loaded weapons. And remember, don't ask the crew to do any work. One of them knows how to handle the boat, but the other two are army officers. We don't need them. They go with the territory."

I dare not close my eyes to sleep now. I could not sleep then. The moment we boarded the ship I felt a throbbing tension beginning inside my head, darkening the ship and the face of the monstrous river. It was a band of pressure, the torture that I first experienced when I was just sixteen years old. It had forced me to seven wasted years of madness and despair.

I tried to eat dinner with the others, but I had no appetite. Soon I left them and went aft to watch the African sunset, a red sun plunging rapidly into grey, lifeless water.

And then I had my first hint of conspiracy among the other three. Walter, Wendy, and Jane were sitting in the forward cabin. I could see their heads, nodding back and forth beneath the electric lamp. They were leaning forward, and now and again one of them would steal a glance aft in my direction. I knew they were talking about me but I had no idea of their words. My head ached terribly, like a jet-lag that had grown worse and worse, and after a few minutes I rested it on the aluminum aft rail and gazed mindlessly down at the turbulent wake. The picture of Master Tunicate came into my mind. I felt a little easier. In ten days we would be in Kintongo, and I would have an answer.

The screws were only a few feet beneath me, threshing loud in the darkness, and I did not hear Jane approach. She put her hand down and gently rubbed the back of my neck and then my forehead. Her touch was cool and dry.

"Are you all right, Steven? Can I bring you a drink?"

That quiet, cultured voice. Just as though we were at a party back in Georgetown. I stood up and hugged her to me in that humid darkness, running my hand along her thin back and then around to cup one little breast.

"I love you, Jane," I said. I had never before offered Jane an intimate touch, never said a word to suggest that I found her attractive.

She did not pull away from me, or turn her head to see if anyone was watching. "I love you, too," she said. "We all love you. Try to be patient, Steven, we'll be there soon. Come on. Wendy is worried."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She took my hand in hers and led me forward, past the silent crew. Their cigarettes glowed in the dark, and the light of the rising moon glimmered off their eyes and the polished barrels of the guns. Walter and Wendy were still sitting in the cabin. They made a space for me and Wendy placed a brimming glass in my hand. I tasted it slowly, wanting to believe that Jane had somehow found a supply of sherry on one of her shopping trips into Kinshasa. It was bad gin and cheap vermouth. I cannot say it was a martini. We had no ice.

The Zaire River inland from Kinshasa is a great bow, arching north and east for a seven-hundred-mile run upriver before it turns south again. We would leave it at Boyoma Falls and press on eastward, taking a line toward Lake Victoria.

Six days of travel brought us to Walter's chosen transfer point, thirty miles from the seventh and last cataract of the falls. We had stopped twice for fuel and fresh food, halts so brief that the second time the army men became very angry. There was no more beer on board. They wanted shore time for drinks and women. When Walter shook his head and spoke back to them sharply in French, they went sullenly to the bow. For the next hour they fired single shots at the white birds that flew or floated on the oily surface of the river. At a hit they would give out hoots of pleasure, but when I went forward to watch them they lowered their guns. After a couple of minutes of uncomfortable silence, they looked sideways at me and shuffled back to sit on their usual spot on the hatch.

I returned to the cabin.

"Good for you, Steven," said Walter. "They don't give a damn what I say to them, but they're afraid of you. What do they know that Jane and I don't know?"

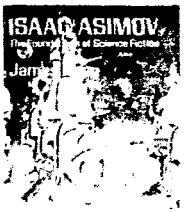
What indeed? It's an accident of nature that made me six feet four inches tall and Walter eight inches shorter. The fire was in him, not me. And yet they were right. They knew.

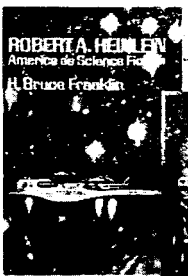
When we left the boat and the steaming river I thought we would also leave behind the crew. The two armed men had other ideas. They piled into the bus right behind us. Walter offered no protest. He made sure that the third crew member would stay with the boat, then put us in gear and headed east. Kintongo was three days ride, over rough tracks. With the loaded trailer we couldn't do more than twenty miles an hour.

The air lost its leaden humidity when we were half a day's journey away from the river. We traveled in the early morning and evening, resting through the middle of the day. Walter, through some mysterious system of his own, had arranged for caches of food and gasoline at villages along the way. We spent the hottest parts of the day and the middle of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Discover the Facts Behind the Fiction





Heinlein, Asimov, Stapledon, Wells—what made these great writers produce their astonishing works of fiction? What events in their own lives shaped their visions of the future? What cultural and scientific changes influenced them? And what do their sometimes bizarre tales really have to say?

Now you can gain a deeper appreciation of the work of your favorite authors with the **Science Fiction Writers** series. Find out:

- How a stormy adolescence set against the cataclysmic 1930s caused Isaac Asimov to embark on the *Foundation* series
- How a case of tuberculosis and an ad in *Thrilling Wonder Stories* launched Heinlein's writing career
- How Darwin influenced H.G. Wells
- How Olaf Stapledon's richly inventive but difficult fiction influenced Arthur Clarke, Poul Anderson, Kurt Vonnegut and many others.

Each volume in the **Science Fiction Writers** series treats an author of distinction. Together the volumes do full justice to science fiction as a pervasive force in western culture.

Special Offer!

To: Oxford University Press
Dept. ECAB, 200 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016

Please send me:

Isaac Asimov: The Foundations of Science Fiction by James Gunn
☐ cloth $18.95 ☐ paper $6.95

Robert Heinlein: America as Science Fiction by H. Bruce Franklin
☐ cloth $22.50 ☐ paper $4.95

The Science Fiction of H.G. Wells by Frank McConnell
☐ cloth $22.50 ☐ paper $4.95

Olaf Stapledon: A Man Divided by Leslie Fiedler
☐ $19.95 ☐ paper $7.95

Order 2 or more books and get 20% off list prices

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

I enclose my check/money order for $_____ *(Please add appropriate sales tax.)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the nights there. The huts were filthy and primitive, and sanitation was nonexistent.

Our own hygiene was not much better. I wondered what my colleagues at the Smithsonian would think of me now. I, always so careful to shower well, to shave twice a day if we went out to dinner, to remove the grime from under my finger nails. If I had to wear a shirt for a second day, or go out in the morning with unpolished shoes, it was a major event. But it is astonishing how quickly we adapt. Now I did not comb my hair for days, or do more than run a wet cloth over my hands and face. And I was still a lot cleaner than our two unwelcome guests from the Zaire army.

We drove steadily east, into rolling country that rose infinitely slowly before us. The mini-bus was like a time machine, ticking off the years. Since leaving Kinshasa we had lost a century. *This* Africa had not changed since the 1880's. Steamboats and native bearers? Not even those. There were radios, certainly, and electric flashlights in the villages. At the sprawl of huts where we paused on our second day I saw a Sears, Roebuck label on a native's plaid shirt, and a carving knife made in Japan. But that was superficial change. I think their diet had not changed in centuries: smoked monkey or fish, fruit and cassava paste—relished, it seemed, by everyone except me. And the real villages came to life after dark, with firelight, drums, and dancing. The rhythms and movements were ageless. I felt the drumbeat driving into my head, until it fused with the pounding of blood inside my brain. I knew that syncopation before I came to Africa. It was my old torture.

I sat on one side of the fire and looked at Jane and Wendy opposite me. Heads close together, and now and then glancing my way. Whispering. About me. At last I stood up and wandered off through the village, out to the dark perimeter where animal night-noises replaced the drums within my skull.

I was able to breathe again. Tomorrow we reached Kintongo.

After a few minutes Walter came away from the fireside and joined me. He had taken off his glasses, and I knew what that meant. First, he was seeing the world as an astigmatic blur; second, he was going to be very serious.

"How are you, Steven?" No beating about the bush, no winding slowly into his subject.

"Excited. We'll be in Kintongo tomorrow."

"If the weather holds up and the paths are good." Walter was the perfect project director because he took nothing for granted. "We're an eight-hour drive from Kintongo in good conditions. Last time it took me nearly eleven; and we're in a wetter season now." He cleared his throat, and his expression became embarrassed and uncertain. "I suppose I'm

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

going to find out the answer in a day or two, and I should have asked you this question long ago; but just what in hell do you hope to find in Kintongo? It's just a little village. Nothing to get excited about."

I did not speak.

"You see, I know why the rest of us are here," he said at last. "We're on an adventure in some of the best wild country on earth. But that's not you, Steven, and I knew it before we began. You could be back home in your study, and a lot happier than you are now. We've watched you for the last week, and seen how you've hated every minute—the mosquitoes, and the food, and the heat. I know you haven't complained, not a word. But this isn't your stamping ground. So why did you want to come?"

"To see the tunicate."

He shook his head. "To see the tunicate. I shouldn't have asked. That damn tunicate. It's a fancy piece of carving. Steven, you're going to be angry as hell in a couple of days. I hope you won't be mad at us."

His mouth puckered up, as though he were trying to inhale with his lips pressed tightly together, and I thought he was about to speak again. But he turned and went slowly back towards the fire.

He hadn't come to see me of his own volition. Jane and Wendy had put him up to it, I was sure. But it was going to be all right. Tomorrow we would be in Kintongo and we would see the tunicate.

In the weeks and months before we left Washington I had teased information about Kintongo from Walter, little by little. He was my only source. The place was unknown to the Smithsonian, or to the map rooms in the Library of Congress.

Walter spoke of a thriving village, maybe a hundred people, in a fine natural setting: a pair of small volcanic cones each rising a few hundred feet above an alluvial plain, the cones overlapping in area and the taller one about fifty feet higher than the other. As volcanoes they were long extinct, and both craters had filled with water. The lake formed in the higher caldera was perhaps four acres in extent, and it fed the lower one, half its size, through a permanent trickling stream. The village of Kintongo sat by that stream. The water of the lakes was clean and deep, and decomposed volcanic ash provided a black soil that was easily worked, deep, and fertile.

The villagers were too intelligent to take their good fortune for granted, and they wanted no competition from new settlers. They were wary with all visitors, especially those with cameras.

Walter had planned our approach and first meeting in Kintongo with care. While we were still in Washington, he and Wendy spent a long time discussing the delicate question of gifts for the village chief. "He'll

LIBRARY.NZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

remember me, you can be sure of that," said Walter. "Lunga's a shrewd old fellow. He'll wonder why I'm back. We need a good reason."

"Touring party?"

"Not if we want to stay a while near the village—a tour wouldn't do that. Not enough to see."

Wendy put her hand up to her forehead and rubbed at the roots of her hair. It was a nervous habit. She would rub until she had made a red patch at the hairline, then go to a mirror and frown in disgust at her reflection. "Working for the World Bank, or AID, on a development project? Bird watchers? Traders? I don't know."

"They don't want to hear anything about development. Lunga would be happy if he never had another visitor from Kinshasa. Bird-watchers is better—there's actually a wonderful breeding-forest a few hours from Kintongo, and we'll visit it. But if we were mainly interested in that we'd naturally stay over there. No, your last shot is the best one. Traders. There are things we can sell in Kintongo, and my first trip helps. Lunga will suspect that my previous visit was a look at the market."

Walter had brought an interesting selection. We had enamel pans, razor blades and disposable razors, flashlights and batteries, plastic plates, bowls, and spoons, a couple of pressure cookers, three boxes of candles that would light themselves again after you blew them out, and—Walter's *pièce de résistance*—a gasoline-powered chain saw.

"This will get him," he said. "They cut a lot of timber for the village, and they always need more. The pressure cooker will be our main gift, but he'll really want the chain saw. Lunga will let us stay until he's talked his way into getting it."

Walter had done an amazing job pulling all his "trade goods" in through Customs with only a pittance of duty and a modest amount of bribes. It was all part of the game—the challenge that made the other three enjoy Africa. And on the way from Kinshasa he had actually done a little trading, just to practice his act for Lunga.

I was in the front seat of the bus as we ascended the slope that would take us into Kintongo. The little trailer was crammed with our food, tents, and supplies, and the volcanic cone was steep-sided. We jolted along in four-wheel drive, at about five miles an hour, and I had plenty of time for a leisurely first inspection of our destination.

It was not a clinical look. My pulse was fast, and I felt light-headed from excitement and lack of sleep.

Here is what I saw: there was a tightly-drawn group of huts, approaching as close as thirty yards to the little lake. Each building was made of tall vertical poles of dry timber, with dry grass stuffed between and grass sheaves plaited above to form sloping roofs. The huts looked fairly fragile, but wind-proof and rain-proof, and that was enough. Cold

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LORDS OF CREATION®

The fascinating new role-playing adventure game from The Avalon Hill Game Company

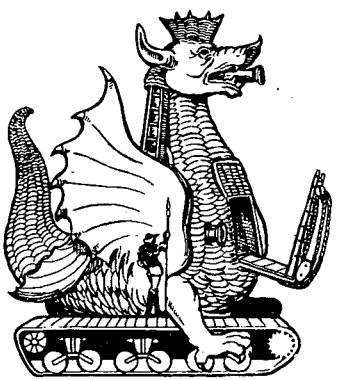
LORDS OF CREATION adventures can take place in any setting the Game Master can imagine. Typical settings include fantasy, science fiction, time travel, alternate dimensions, mystery thriller, parallel worlds, horror and science fantasy, yet the game is in no way "generic" and has its own consistent theme. The combat system is designed to handle any situation from sword play through rifle fire to blaster shots, plus psychic, futuristic and magical powers.

Lords of Creation®
$12.00

Basic Game complete with:
64-page Rules Book
64-page Book of Foes
Set of Polyhedral Dice

Horn of Roland®
$8.00

Expansion Module #1 complete with:
48-page Adventure
Multiple Player Aid Handouts



Characters begin the game as "normal" humans, but there is no limit to how powerful the characters can become. The gaming system is reasonably simple, with additional and optional rules that can be added as the basic rules are mastered. The game system even allows Game Masters to add their own rules, if desired.

The Avalon Hill Game Company
4517 HARFORD ROAD, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21214

Available wherever great games are sold!
For Credit Card Purchasing,
call TOLL FREE 800-638-9292

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would almost never be a problem. It was just as well, because everything looked tinder-dry and a fire inside any of the huts would be an insanity. The communal cooking-place sat between the village buildings and the lake. An enamel bathtub had been set up to catch the outflow of the stream where it trickled down into the lake, and two women were filling pans from it as we drove slowly up the slope and stopped at a respectful distance from the huts and the cooking area.

They were ready for us. Our arrival had obviously been long expected. The top of the higher volcanic cone must provide an excellent lookout point across twenty miles of plain, and Lunga was wary enough of visitors that he would keep that post well-staffed. It seemed as though the whole village had turned out for our arrival. Walter had been on the low side with his estimate. I did a rough count before we had exchanged our first words, and there must have been two hundred people thronged around our bus.

Lunga sat in state outside the biggest hut. He was quite recognizable from Walter's description and quick pencil sketch, a pot-bellied man whose grizzled hair didn't match his smooth face and young eyes. He waited calmly, nodding to himself in a thoughtful way when he saw Walter. He looked briefly at me, then turned his attention to Wendy and Jane. I wondered if he had seen white women in Kintongo before.

My inspection of Lunga was even more cursory; for behind him, standing against the wall of the hut and supported on a well-made wooden trestle, was the object that I had traveled six thousand miles to see. It lay on its side now, rather than upright as it had shown in the slide, but it was quite unmistakably the tunicate.

I would have liked to go over and look at it at once, but even in my urgency I realized that we had to go through formalities. What I had underestimated was the length of time that those formalities would occupy. First there had to be formal greetings. I soon discovered that in Africa even the meeting of total strangers can be time-consuming. And we had another complicating factor, one that Jane had already predicted—though in her practical way she had also pointed out that there was nothing we could do about it.

I mean the presence of the two army men, the representatives of the far-off President in Kinshasa. Lunga's immediate reaction to that was a cold aloofness during our introductions, with a suggestion through his interpreter that we were clearly just passing through his village and would be on our way within the hour. But I suspect he knew the realities of the situation very well, and could see that we liked the army presence even less than he did. For after his formal expression of displeasure he at once provided us all with cups of beer and invited us to sit on the floor with him. Then he and Walter began their discussions, in the curious

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mixed-language talk that you hear a lot in the middle of the continent. I could understand most of the French and English phrases and guess at some others, but sometimes I was lost completely.

But then I was also preoccupied. It was certainly not a carving, or even a paper model, as Wendy had irritatingly suggested that first evening. Six feet was a better size estimate than seven, because the native women in Walter's slide must have been shorter than I expected; and the surface had a glossy, finished look that had not come across in the slide, either, almost as though it had been recently varnished or polished. The opening in the upper end—the inhalent siphon—was about ten inches across, and I could see that the whole interior had been scooped clean. The big surprise was at the other end. The usual sessile nature of a mature tunicate did not allow for any form of true flexible foot. But Master Tunicate had three distinct lower pads, each looking as though it was designed for real locomotion.

I was itching for a closer look, but a roar of laughter from Lunga brought my attention back to our little circle. The cups of beer had been steadily refilled every few minutes, and with the sun beating down on the bare black earth we were all sweating hugely. I felt terrible, but Walter seemed to be enjoying himself and he was doing famously. He had done his razzle-dazzle with plastic cups and plates and trick candles, and had presented Lunga with a pressure cooker. Now he was all set to demonstrate the chain saw.

Lunga's eyes lit up at the roar of the motor and the flying sawdust. He called for more beer, and sent a villager away to bring back the biggest log he could find. The noise was horrendous. When we went back to the bus, an hour later, we were all half-deafened. But everyone was tipsy and seemed well pleased with the meeting. On the way to the bus we paused by the pool. It was obviously well-used by the natives, and it didn't look as clean as Walter had advertised.

"That's it, Steven," said Walter. "In the middle of all the other chit-chat I asked about your friend. He said that Master Tunicate"—this was the first time I heard that phrase spoken—"wasn't there one day, then there was a monster rain storm and electrical storm that night, and the next day he *was* there, in this pond. Nobody saw him come. Lunga says he knew they had found a god, but he said it in a way that made me feel he might not mean it. The other villagers believe it—but perhaps Lunga doesn't."

Walter may have been right. But that problem has been solved. Lunga is now a part of Master Tunicate's entourage.

We went closer to stare into the depths of the pool.

"How deep is it?" I asked.

Walter shook his head, and I turned to Jane. "Think I could dive it?"

LICENSED TO NZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One of my few athletic talents, as we had found in Bermuda. I was better in water than any of them.

She looked doubtful. "You could, but I don't think you should. I saw signs of schisto in some of the villagers. And you can tell they don't try to keep this pond clean, or have any decent sanitation."

"Schisto?" I asked.

"Schistosomiasis," said Walter. "I don't know if this is a schisto area or not, but we don't want to take the risk."

"But I'd only be going in once."

"Quite enough," said Jane severely. "I'll tell you an African riddle: Do you know the difference between true love and schistosomiasis?"

"Answer: Schisto is forever," said Wendy. "It's a disease with no cure. Steven, you're not going in that pond. We've done very well so far, Walter has managed miracles here—let's not spoil it."

"Does Lunga really believe we're traders?" said Jane.

"He thinks Steven and I are," said Walter. "I told him you and Wendy are our women. He understood that."

"And he believed you brought us with you all the way from America?" said Jane. "That sounds fishy. I bet Lunga's more suspicious of us than you realize. He knows women can be had right here."

"He said that to me." Walter's face was expressionless. "But I pointed out to him that you two are spectacular-exceptional-amazing in bed. He was very interested. He asked if he could try you both, especially the long one. I told him maybe—if the trading here goes well."

He headed for the bus before Jane or Wendy could hit him with a good reply. They hurried after him, cursing. I stayed on for another look at the lake. The water was a little green and cloudy, but I imagined I could see bottom. It ought to be easy enough to dive it, even at night.

Our meeting in Kintongo had not helped my sleeping difficulty at all. It had made it worse. Lying in our tent while Wendy peacefully slumbered beside me, I found my mind running in circles over the same issues that had surfaced on that first evening in Great Falls.

Problems.

There were physical problems with a six or seven foot tunicate that I had not mentioned to the others.

To take one specific: think about *scale*. Like the idea of a six-foot ant or housefly, the existence of a very large tunicate would introduce all kinds of physiological difficulties. For example, a tunicate eats by inhaling water through a siphon, straining it for food particles, and exhaling the water through another siphon. I could see that might work quite well for a very large tunicate—after all, blue whales are the biggest animals on earth, and they eat through a similar process of straining

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE BEST IN PBM

BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE

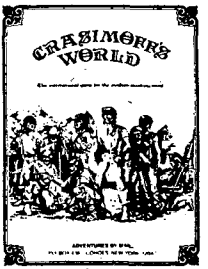
Beyond the Stellar Empire (BSE) is a science fiction role-playing game of unparalleled scope. You assume the persona of an interstellar starship captain interacting in the most detailed play-by-mail game ever created. BSE has it all; a multitude of unique solar systems composed of *individually designed worlds, politics, and diplomacy,* realistic economics and logistics, a comprehensive combat system, chartered companies and Imperial services, alien races, and exploration, invasion, and colonization of hostile planets.

TOP PBM GAME of 1983 and 1984

Beyond the Stellar Empire was chosen by editors of *GAMES* magazine as one of the top 100 games for both 1983 and 1984, the only PBM game so honored.

Complete Rules Package costs $5.00. Starter Package costs $17.00 and includes rules package, set-up, and two turns.

CRASIMOFF'S WORLD



Crasimoff's World is a PBM game of extraordinary quality and detail. Lead your party of fighters, magic users and priests through a fantastic land filled with adventure, magic, and danger. Each party member has a wide range of attributes and possessions. Loot dungeons, redeem swampmen heads for bounty, explore ancient ruins, raid dwarven encampments, and battle hill trolls in their underground domain. The world is complete in every detail; history, ecology, mythos, geography, and much, much more.

Complete Rules Package costs $3.00. Starter Package costs $15. -includes rules package, set-up, and two turns.

CAPITOL

Capitol is a fast playing strategic space warfare game that divides players into teams, pitting them against each other in an orgy of xenophobic fury. Capitol is unique in that it is a perfect introductory game for an individual new to play-by-mail games while at the same time detailed enough for the most experienced gamer.

Complete Rules Package costs $2.50. Starter Package costs $16.00 and includes rules package, set-up, and four turns.

Adventures By Mail has processed over 100,000 turns

WRITE OR CALL FOR OUR FREE DETAILED BROCHURES
MASTERCARD AND VISA CARD HOLDERS CAN START IN A GAME IMMEDIATELY BY TELEPHONING OUR HOTLINE SERVICE AT 518-237-4870
SEND CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS TO
ADVENTURES BY MAIL, P.O.B. 436, COHOES, N.Y. 12047
MONEYBACK GUARANTEE IF NOT SATISFIED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

water for food. But unlike the whale, the tunicate has no lungs. It relies on the same water that carries in the food to carry in oxygen. And for a six-foot tunicate, that supply would be totally inadequate. So a six-foot tunicate is impossible. Very good—but there were the remains of one less than half a mile away.

That, plus a dozen other more specialized questions of tunicate anatomy and function, assured that I would be awake well before dawn. When the sun came up I was already dressed, outside the tent, and firing up the stove.

I made plenty of noise, so by the time I had boiled water the rest of them were stirring, yawning and muttering inside the tents. They joined me outside and we had a hefty but hurried breakfast. For various reasons, all four of us wanted an early start to the day's work.

An hour after first light, Walter and I were heading on foot for Kintongo. When we left, Jane and Wendy had started to reallocate food and supplies between the bus and the trailer. The plan called for a trip to the bird breeding-grounds as soon as the two of us returned—Walter insisted that it was a not-to-be-missed sight, one of the main reasons for visiting this part of Zaire. I had not objected.

Lunga was an early riser, too. He was waiting for us when we got there, yawning and scratching, chewing on a leg of monkey *boucané* that looked disturbingly like the smoked limb of a human baby, and smoking an ancient yellow-brown meerschaum pipe. He was more than ready to begin discussions, and after the obligatory few minutes of general chitchat he and Walter got down to serious business. It was my chance to stroll over to the tunicate and take a much closer look.

There are three orders of tunicate—Ascidiacea, Thaliacea, and Copelata—and no one can pretend to know every detail of every species. I certainly won't make that claim. But I do know the features common to all the orders, and Master Tunicate—while undoubtedly a tunicate—had anomalies that perturbed me greatly. The strangest was an extension of the tunic structure *inside* the body cavity, creating what amounted to a complicated internal skeleton as well as the usual tough outer layer. No tunicate had a skeleton. And there was a great bulge between the two siphons. That was where in a normal tunicate the wad of nerve tissue that makes up the animal's "brain" should lie. Here it was preposterously well-developed, a significant fraction of the total body mass. And those lower pads; they looked less and less as though they were designed for simple attachment to a rock, and more and more like feet.

There were so many questions. If only I could find a living specimen . . .

I went back to Walter's side, and found him alone for the moment. Lunga had stepped away to another hut.

"He'll be back quickly enough," said Walter. He grinned in a self-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

satisfied way. "He wants to buy that saw so bad, and I told him it wasn't available for sale because you had already promised it elsewhere. But I told him maybe if he wanted to trade *that*"—he jerked his head towards the great convex cylinder on the wooden trestle—"I'd try to talk you into a deal. I said you were fascinated with it."

"Thanks, Walter." My throat was suddenly tight with nervous anticipation. But when Lunga returned I leaned back into the shade and tried to look coolly indifferent.

Lunga was carrying an oblong piece of blue-grey metal or plastic, about three feet long. The surface was scored with a regular grid, an accurate pattern of ruled lines, and the edges of the material branched many times, to terminate in a broad sheaf of tiny wires. He jabbered away at Walter for a few minutes, while I struggled unsuccessfully to follow.

Walter shook his head firmly and turned to me. "He won't trade your friend there. Quite honestly, I think he'd be happy to see the last of Master Tunicate, but the villagers would give him trouble. They think they have a powerful magic going for them. But he says that blue gadget was with the god when it arrived in the village, and he'd be quite willing to trade that to us. He asked if you wanted to buy it, and I said no."

Walter turned for another two minutes of rapid cross-talk, then suddenly he rocked back to squat on his heels. I noticed an abrupt change in his manner when he looked across at me.

"Holy Hell," he said. "Steven, you're a magician. I don't see how you could read something significant out of a casual look at one of my slides, but I think we may have hit the jackpot here." He stared across at the lake. "Lunga just told me there's a whole 'iron house' at the bottom of that pond, with a lot of stuff in it like that piece of junk he's holding. But it's all made in one piece, and too heavy for them to bring up—they ran ropes to it. When the water was clear they could see it down there. He thinks it was the tunicate's house at first, and it lived down there until they caught it in a big net and held it up at the surface. Lunga suggests that we could attach a cable from the bus, and use that to drag the whole thing up, and if we did that, he'd trade it to us—for a *lot* of goods."

My stomach felt like a lump of lead, and my heart was racing. "Ask him if he's sure there was only one. There could be others, still living down there."

Walter spat out the question, and Lunga shook his head firmly.

"No chance of that, he says." Walter sighed. "There was only the one. But he says there have been other changes in the pond since the tunicate died. There are fish in it now, and before it didn't have any. The villagers say that the tunicate's death brought those fish. They try to catch them now, that's one reason the pond is dirty." He groaned. "Steven, do you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

see what they did? They caught it, the only one, and they kept it as a god—kept it on the surface until they killed it."

If my heart had raced before, now it felt as though it had stopped completely. Walter didn't know much about tunicates; he didn't understand the possible significance of his own words. But what he had said suggested that one of my own fantasies could be true.

I could not speak. Luckily, Walter, for his own reasons, felt just as strong a need to get away to where he could think as I did. We made rapid and disorganized farewells to Lunga, promising to consider his possible deal, and staggered back downhill to our own camp.

When we arrived back at the bus we found that we had been gone less than two hours. It felt like weeks.

I didn't want Walter to tell Jane and Wendy what we had heard, but of course there was no way of stopping him. Luckily he omitted some facts that I considered relevant—Jane might have picked up their significance.

"From God knows where," he said. He was walking up and down in the camp, shaking with tension and excitement. "Lightyears, it must have been. And landed here—crash-landed, I bet. So what did they do? The stupid black bastards caught him, and named him as a god, and kept him in a net. Until the poor bugger died."

Walter was more upset than I had ever seen him before. He doesn't have a speck of racist in him. That "black bastards" revealed more of his torment than a thousand curses.

The two women were staring at him sceptically, then glancing from time to time at me.

"Calm down, Walter," said Jane. "You're jumping to conclusions again. Steven, you were there too and you haven't said a word. Do you agree with all this?"

I shook my head. "How can I? They were talking in gobbledegook. You know I can't understand more than one word in four when you talk to Lunga."

"I'm damned sure I didn't misunderstand anything," snapped Walter. "I know quite well that Steven didn't follow everything—but he saw that piece of ship that Lunga had with him."

They looked at me, and I shrugged. "I certainly saw *something*. But it could have been a lot of stuff—from a television set, or a crashed airplane, or some other mechanical gadget. Hell, I couldn't tell what it was—any more than Walter could. Electronics isn't our line."

"But what are we going to *do*?" said Walter desperately. "All right, suppose there's a chance I have it wrong. We can't risk the chance that I'm correct, and do nothing. We have to *act*."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From the dunes of Frank Herbert to the chronicles of Thomas Convenant to the delights of Tolkien...

Experience ALL the best-selling hard-to-find Science Fiction and Fantasy you dare to imagine... in low-cost paperbacks.

If you crave the excitement and adventure of good science fiction and fantasy but hate waiting in line to buy your favorites...If you buy a lot but hate to pay expensive hardcover prices...If you want them all but don't want to join a book club ...It's time you discovered the **other** way to buy the bestsellers. A way that's quick, convenient and easy on your pocketbook—The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Paperback Catalog!

Over 650 Titles to choose from!

If you shopped for months you'd never find the 100's of bestsellers you find in minutes in The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Paperback Catalog. Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert, Phillip Jose Farmer, Star Wars, Battlestar Gallactica...all the best science fiction and fantasy storytellers are here. Not just one or two of an author's titles, but everything in print! And the largest selection of popular adult science fiction and fantasy available. Over 650 titles in all, from hard-to-find to soon-to-be released. All in the most inexpensive paperback editions!

Having The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Paperback Catalog is like having the bookstore come to you. Not just any bookstore. But one that specializes in out-of-this-world adventure! And unlike high pressure clubs there are no catches or rules. You buy any number of books when **you** want to buy them. No "automatic shipments" of books you never ordered but have to pay for!

Easy ordering, fast delivery!

Ordering from The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Paperback Catalog is easy. You can charge books by mail or over the phone (for even speedier service). No waiting on out-of-stock titles...our giant inventory ensures prompt delivery. Right to your door, of course. And you pay only a minimum handling charge for the luxury of shopping at home—unhurried and hassle-free.

How to Order your Shop-At-Home Catalog Right Away.

To receive The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Catalog, send $1.00 with the coupon below. Then sit back and prepare for excitement in the comfort of your armchair...at prices you can always afford. Shopping at home for bestsellers. Once you've tried it, you'll find there is no other way.

☐ I want to shop at home for best-selling sci-fi and fantasy at low paperback prices! Rush me The Shop-At-Home Science Fiction and Fantasy Paperback Catalog. I've enclosed $1.00 to cover postage and handling.

☐ Send me all five Shop-At-Home Paperback Catalogs —Science Fiction and Fantasy, Mystery, Western, Romance, and Fiction/Non-Fiction. I've enclosed $2.00 to cover postage and handling.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Mail coupon to:

BOOK MAILING SERVICE
Box 690 Dept A 4
Rockville Center, NY 11571

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jane and Wendy looked at each other. I could imagine their train of thought: *first we had trouble with Steven, then as soon as he seems to be behaving normally we get a problem with Walter. Just one damn thing after another . . .*

"Sure, we have to act," said Jane. "But we don't have to do anything right away." She took Walter by the elbow and began to tug him gently towards the bus. "Nothing will happen if we delay for a day or two, will it? Kintongo won't go away, and the machine will still be there at the bottom of the lake tomorrow, or a week from now. So I say we shouldn't rush into anything. We should get out of here, take our trip, and think it over while we're gone."

"You mean, just do *nothing*? Damn it, Jane—"

"It's your own rule, Walter. You've preached it at me often enough. When in doubt, think it out. So let's do that, while we're away looking at birds."

Walter glared at her, but he still allowed himself to be towed along. I knew he was hooked, and it was time for me to get into the conversation.

"I agree with Jane," I said. "You three carry on. But I think I'll hang around here and take a day's rest. I don't feel all that good."

"Sick?" said Wendy at once, and she moved to my side.

"Not sick." I allowed her to feel my forehead. "See? I'm tired, that's all. I haven't been sleeping well since we first got off the plane."

They all knew that. On the other hand, they wanted me along with them, or it wouldn't be the right mixture. I let them talk a little more, to the point where Wendy was ready to assure me I could get lots of sleep on the trip, then I nodded my head to the tent pitched on the other side of the trailer.

"If I stay it solves another problem," I said. "Them. Can you imagine them putting out their cigarettes and keeping quiet? One shot from those rifles, and you'd scare off every bird in Africa. Those two won't shut up just because you want them to. But if I'm here, I'll bet they stay with me. They don't want to split up, and they'd rather loaf here than crawl through the bush after you three."

"I was planning on sneaking off without them," said Walter. "I parked the bus with that in mind. We can do a clear run for half a mile down the hill, with the clutch in and the engine off."

"You can still do that if you want to," I said. "But this way they'll feel no duty to chase after you. Make sure there's plenty of food and gin here, and I guarantee they'll decide to stay and guard me." I patted Walter on the shoulder, turning him to face Jane and Wendy. "Don't argue about it, now. You three go off and enjoy yourselves. And don't worry, I'll find plenty to occupy me here—even if I don't feel like sleeping and eating the whole time."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

Jane, Walter, and Wendy left within the hour. The two army men were predictably irritated when they finally yawned their way out of their tent and discovered what had happened, but they showed no interest at all in pursuit on foot.

I tried friendly conversation with them. I failed completely. We understood each other easily enough, despite my clumsy French, but I was rebuffed by averted eyes and uncomfortable body language. I gave up after a few minutes. They happily accepted my offer of two bottles of gin and took them back to the shade of the trailer.

I went to our tent and lay on my camp bed all afternoon. I had a lot to do, but I could not begin at once. My activities must wait until dusk. I was in a peculiar mental state. Jittery, but peaceful. My mind felt in a turmoil, yet at the same time I was totally contented. I was doing exactly what I wanted to do.

Darkness near the equator comes fast, a heavy curtain pulled without warning across the horizon. With the last glimmer of light I was quietly approaching the lake on the side opposite from Kintongo. It was full dark when I undressed, stacked my clothes twenty yards from the lake, and straightened to look again at the village. The earth was warm beneath my feet, holding the day's heat. Across the pool the cooking fires were burning brightly enough to hinder anyone who might look across in my direction. I walked forward and eased cautiously into the calm water.

It felt pleasantly cool and soothing on my body, and the bottom sloped away steeply. In a few steps I was chest-deep. I stood motionless, took a dozen long, deep breaths, then dove out and down. As my head went under I felt a vibration through my whole body, as though the water of the pool was moving in small, turbulent waves.

I switched on the flashlight. Part of my afternoon had gone to making it waterproof, wrapping it tightly in transparent plastic bags and sealing them shut. It was a powerful nine-volt lamp, meant for use reading in the tent or in the bush at night, and its focused beam cut a zone of illumination through the cloudy green water. I directed the light downwards, following the incline to the deepest part of the pond, and swam along the narrow cone.

The structure that Lunga had told us about was visible at once. It was a blue-grey octahedron, about ten meters across, lying slightly tilted on the bottom. The edges and corners were beveled and smooth, and I could see large, rectangular openings in the middle of two of the faces. I swam towards one of them, halted a few feet away, and directed the beam inside. The whole interior was a maze of lines and cables, criss-crossing in all directions. The walls were riddled with small pockets, each a few

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inches across and about the same depth. After a few seconds I switched off the flashlight, turned, and kicked my way back to the surface.

I took another dozen long breaths. The structure made no sense. There were no mechanical controls, no dials or screens or instruments; no furnishings, nothing recognizable as living accommodation. It did not fit with our ideas for a vehicle or a home.

I went back down. This time I went closer and put my head and upper body in through one of the openings.

That action almost killed me. The gentle vibration that I had sensed at the surface became overpowering within the hull. It took me, shook me, and elevated me. I could feel happiness running wild along my veins, and for the first time in my life I understood the reason for existence. I finally had something to protect, to live for and to cherish.

In that moment of revelation I opened my mouth wide enough to gasp out air and inhale water. I choked, dropped the flashlight, convulsed, and was lucky enough to jerk away from the aperture and drift upwards towards the surface. I came out at last into open air, where I let out an agonized cough and ejected cold water from my lungs. Then I was forced to float for a couple of minutes, recovering my breath. My heart was racing at full speed, like a fast drumbeat inside my chest.

Finally I was able to dive again. I approached the octahedron cautiously and picked up my flashlight, still switched on.

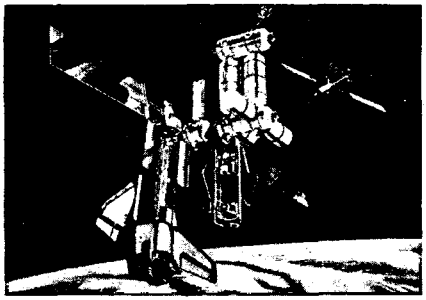
And it was then, hesitating once more near the openings in the hull, that I saw them. A dozen long-tailed darting shapes, each about two feet long, flashed away from the light beam and wriggled off to the dark shelter on the other side of the pond. I swam after them until I ran out of air, watching them retreating from the flashlight and my tiring body. Then I let myself float again to the surface, paddled slowly back to the place I had entered the pond, and dragged myself out. I lay down at poolside, hardly able to move. My brain was possessed by an intolerable knowledge.

This knowledge: Lunga had looked in the pool for another tunicate, but all he had found were fish. Naturally. Neither he nor Walter knew one key fact: the larval form of a tunicate looks nothing like the mature animal; it looks like a sort of tadpole, free-swimming and with a well-developed head and tail.

Anger boiled inside me. Kintongo had found Master Tunicate, taken him as their god, and held him on the surface until starvation, asphyxiation, or chemical imbalances had brought a slow and agonizing death. But the story was not over. Now they would hunt for and catch the children of their god, to serve with their cassava and smoked monkey.

I could not live with that thought. I lay for a long time, consumed by rage and fear. At last, I dressed myself and headed back for our camp.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



NEXT STOP:
SPACE STATION

". . . I am directing NASA to develop a permanently manned Space Station, and to do it within a decade." . . . President Ronald Reagan, State of the Union message, January 25, 1984.

Are you a person of vision? Are you excited about this next new stepping stone in mankind's future? Did you know that there is a magazine that covers these developments better than any other? Did you know that there is a non-profit public interest organization, founded by famed space pioneer Dr. Wernher von Braun, that actively supports all aspects of a strong U.S. space program? That organization is the NATIONAL SPACE INSTITUTE. If you're a member, here's what you'll get:

- 12 big issues of Space World magazine. Tops in the field. Follow the political, social and technological aspects of all Space Station developments—and all other space exploration and development too!
- VIP package tours to Kennedy Space Center to watch a Space Shuttle launch—the thrill of a lifetime!
- Regional meetings and workshops—get to meet an astronaut!
- Exclusive Space Hotline and Dial-A-Shuttle services.
- Discounts on valuable space merchandise and books.
- and much, much more!

So if you are that person of vision, your eyes upon the future, excited about the adventure of space exploration, let us send you more information on how to join the NSI. Just fill in your name and address and our packet will be on its way. AND, we'll send you a FREE Space Shuttle Launch Schedule which is yours to keep whatever you decide to do!

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, & Zip _____

NATIONAL SPACE INSTITUTE
West Wing Suite 203
600 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024
(202) 484-1111

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

Our camp lay on the slope of the volcanic cones, about six hundred yards downhill from the village of Kintongo. I walked back there slowly. And I realized the distance would be a real curse for the night's work.

Not yet, though. My main worry initially was the army men. They had stayed in the camp, interested in neither wild life nor village. They would probably be there now, and maybe in a foul mood. If they interfered it might affect my plans.

I concluded that I could not permit any hint of that. But I knew what to do. My thoughts had a strange, abstract purity to them, emerging full-blown in my brain with every detail clear.

I tiptoed the last hundred yards to camp, but it was really unnecessary. They had obviously been drinking since afternoon, and were both snoring by the trailer when I approached. One of them stirred as I reached for his gun, but he gave me no trouble.

That was progress. I could take the next, laborious step.

Even if the mini-bus had been available, I dared not risk the noise. It took nearly four hours to make three heavily-laden journeys on foot up to a point just outside the perimeter of the village. Each trip I piled the cans I was carrying into a neat stack by a twisted, fire-scarred tree. On the third trip I went almost into the village itself. Everything was quiet. The eating, the drinking, and the late night story-telling were finished.

I realize now that I should not have attempted the fourth trip. I had enough material already. But I wanted to make doubly sure, and after a few minutes rest I set off again to our camp. I was getting impatient, too—it was full night, and the moon was shrouded in thick, fast-moving clouds. Rain would be a disaster at this stage. I hurried the final couple of hundred yards into camp, making no attempt to travel quietly, and headed again for the store of gasoline cans.

I found Walter, Jane, and Wendy, waiting for me by the mini-bus.

Naturally, they had found the bodies of the two army men. I had made no attempt to conceal them. I had assumed, you see, that I would have ample time. And that should have been true. But Wendy must have been worried about me, and instead of staying through the night they had cut short their watch and headed for home.

Their faces held no accusation; just bewilderment, and the sick expression that accompanies a sudden discovery of death.

"Steven!" Wendy came running to me and put her arms around me. "Something terrible has happened to the army men. They're both dead."

I could feel her shivering against me. And I felt the spasm, as though an electric shock had been applied to her, when she jerked back from me.

I peered down at her. My head was roaring, a maelstrom of conflicting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

needs and urges. I should have had lots of time. If they had been away most of the night, as they said they would be, everything would have been all right. We would all be together at this moment, drinking Jane's gin and ready to head back to America. But I had been too hurried and careless.

"Steven. Your jacket. Your jacket."

Her voice was puzzled. Still no accusation, but an odd and lifeless weight. I had a sudden premonition. They would want to indulge in endless discussions. They would demand explanations, and they would want to do something about the army men. Worst of all, unless I could give them a full explanation they would try to stop me.

I turned, wanting to ignore them and head back to the village at once. But then I hesitated. They might follow me there, disturb me, prevent me from taking the necessary actions. And that was intolerable. I had to explain.

"I have to go back to the village at once," I said. "There's work to be done there. They killed him, you know. You see that, don't you? He came here to help us. And they murdered him."

"Steven." Walter came up close to me and grabbed my arms. He tilted his head up, staring at my eyes in the light of the gasoline lamp. Tears were rolling helplessly down my cheeks. "My God. Pull yourself together. There's been bad work here."

Then he stopped and took a slow step away from me. Like Wendy, he had seen the blood on my jacket.

"Stay here, all of you," I said. "I must go back to the village. You won't be needed. They murdered, and they are trying to murder again. That has to be taken care of properly. It will be only an hour's work. After that we can talk as much as you want."

But they wouldn't do it, you see. They couldn't understand what *had* to happen; so instead they came and stood around and wouldn't let me leave. And I had to leave.

"Wendy," I said. "Get out of the way, please. I told you I have work to do. It's very important. If you won't help me, then at least don't hinder me."

She clutched at my arm. "He's sick again," she said to Jane and Walter. "I told you he was getting worse. Give me a hand with him. We have to get him to bed and give him sedatives."

Her words destroyed me. *Sick again.* She had promised she would never mention my problems to anyone else, ever. I broke loose from her, broke loose from Walter, avoided Jane's quick restraining lunge, and ran away from the light of the gasoline lantern. They must not follow me to the village. I did what had to be done, and then I ran off into the brush. I

WWW.SFMUSEUM.NZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

felt full of energy, strong and confident. But I was still worried by the danger of rain. And the tears ran free down my cheeks.

I reached the outskirts of the village in just a few minutes. I took two cans of gasoline from the heap and carried them cautiously into the middle of Kintongo. The great outer case, the sarcophagus of Master Tunicate, still stood outside the biggest hut. I splashed gasoline all around its base. I was generous in the amount, and I tried not to rush. The funeral pyre of a god deserved time and care. Then I worked my way slowly outward, covering the walls of every building with liquid and placing a broad ring of gasoline around each one. There were ten buildings. I made four trips, each time expecting that someone would stir inside one of them. But they slept deeply.

When all the dry vegetation was thoroughly soaked, I ran a thin trail of gas thirty yards from the village and ignited it. The flame seemed to catch and hesitate for a second, close to my feet, then it ran off as fast as my eye could follow along the line I had marked. Within ten seconds there were flames everywhere in the village. The huts were all blazing.

Most of the buildings were instant infernos, flaming too fiercely for anyone to escape from them. But two huts, close to the outskirts of the village, burned less strongly than the others. Four people ran screaming out of them, two men and a woman dragging a young child.

I had worried about such a situation. It had made me sit and hold my head in my hands for many minutes. What was the correct action to take? Then I realized that the answer was obvious. This was a deity's funeral pyre, and a god had a right to his servants. *All* his servants.

I lifted the rifle, set it to automatic, and fired. They fell into the flames. No more people came out of the huts. After a few minutes I took my camera, came as close to the blaze as I could stand, and photographed the flames that licked around the great tunicate shell. The last mortal remains of Master Tunicate vanished as I watched. I stayed for two hours, but there was nothing more to see. Nothing at all. And at last I lay down on the hard black earth and cradled my head on my arms. For the first time since I came to Africa, I slept a deep and purifying sleep.

Dawn woke me, dawn and heavy rain. It hissed down into the blackened ash of the village, quenching every ember. And it beat on my unprotected scalp to begin again the drumming inside my brain. I got to my feet, went to a thick-canopied tree a few yards away, and stood beneath it until the downpour was over. The rain sluiced down, hammering the soil and bouncing back two feet high in a white, seething spray. It did not last long. Within half an hour the clouds had gone, the sun was well up, the ground was steaming, and I could head back to our camp.

That was where it became unendurable. I had done what had to be done. I knew I would not like what came next, and I was weeping again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But it was far worse than I expected. You see, I had not known about the flies. The heat and the rain brought them out in their millions, more than I had ever seen before. They buzzed and swirled about my head all the way to the camp, clouds of them.

Within our camp itself there were more than you would ever believe. And I had to go into their midst. There was no choice. I couldn't leave Jane and Walter and Wendy like that, of course I couldn't. They were dearer to me than anyone else in the world, my friends and my true beloved. But they lay so thickly covered by flies that all I saw through my haze of tears were three humming, purple-black mounds, their outlines indistinct and wavering.

It sickened me to go near, and it took all my strength to dig places for the three of them. Gasoline drove the flies away temporarily. After I put Wendy in I took the wedding band from my finger and placed it on her hand. We had noted this fact long ago: my third finger is just as thick as her thumb's second joint.

Jane and Walter would lie together. It was what they wanted, and it was only right. I took off Walter's glasses, and smoothed the hair back from his brow, the way he had done so often. He looked peaceful, and very young.

The army officers I did not bury. I splashed gasoline over them and lit it. Then I struck camp for a final time, climbed into the mini-bus, and headed west. I did not bother with the trailer at all.

Within seventy-two hours I was back at Boyoma Falls. The boat was where we had left it, moored close to the bank. The solitary crew member was nowhere to be found, but he appeared eventually from the bush.

He looked at me and tried to run. I caught him easily. He screamed and fell to the ground in a fetal position, covering his hands with his eyes. I lifted him with one hand, and his teeth chattered in his head.

It took a little while to make him understand my French. But I did it. He is just a few feet away from me now, steering the boat, working as hard as any man ever worked. Like me, he has not slept since we left Boyoma Falls—five days. I do not think he will sleep until we reach Kinshasa and I leave for home.

I am almost done. That is good. This writing must be finished before we reach the city, before the President's office asks what has become of the army men.

The writing will be done, but it cannot end here. I know that. Even if the Zaire authorities can be satisfied easily, there will be questions in Washington. It was an expedition conducted with Government grant monies—there have to be written reports.

That is good. I will report everything. I did the right thing—the only possible thing. Yet I know that I will be punished.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I can stand that. What I cannot stand is the loss of Wendy, Jane and Walter.

I promised proof. You will find it on the outskirts of Kintongo, near the roots of the old, fire-scarred tree. There is the roll of film that I took, encased in a sealed plastic box that should withstand many tropical seasons. There are small fragments of the ship, the one that bore him here. There are the two rifles, the two shallow graves, the wedding ring. They will give you all the proof that I have written the exact truth.

For me, that type of evidence is unnecessary. I know what I am: a servant. I am a servant of the Living God.

This is the message he gave me when I visited his home: *Protect My children.*

Master Tunicate will come again. When He does, you will all be as I am. ●

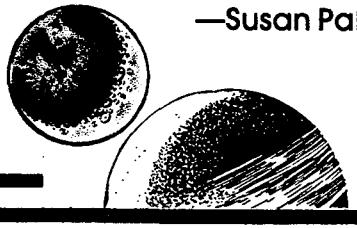
MOVING? If you want your subscription to *IAsfm* to keep up with you, send both your old address and your new one (and the ZIP codes for both, please!) to our subscription department: Box 1933, Marion OH 43306.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"THE UNIVERSE IS FAR DUSTIER THAN EXPECTED."

So said the science section of the *Times*.
One thinks of physicists with rags and brooms
poking about in long-deserted rooms,
finding old bottle caps and tarnished dimes
behind the radiators, friendly junk.
They'd save the attic for some autumn day
and marvel at its age, its disarray,
its unexpected treasures: Look, a trunk
which someone left, old clippings which report
galactic births, this grainy photograph,
faded and torn, once signed by silent stars—
all that debris to puzzle through and sort
on rainy afternoons. They scrub and laugh:
We'll renovate this house. We'll make it ours.

—Susan Palwick



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT

ALTERNATE VIEWPOINT

by Norman Spinrad

art: Hank Jankus

In last month's Viewpoint, "The Little Tin God of Characterization," Isaac Asimov took a controversial look at what constitutes good science fiction. This month, Norman Spinrad shows us an alternate view of the value of characterization in a science fiction story.

It was with some trepidation that I agreed to accept Shawna's challenge to rebut Isaac Asimov's "The Little Tin God of Characterization" in these pages. Not only must it appear a certain act of *lèse majesté* to attempt to refute the Good Doctor in the pages of his very own magazine, it requires me to argue against the proven success of a writer whose works I have long enjoyed and who certainly has had many more best-sellers than I have. Still, I could not deny that *someone* had to stand up for the centrality of characterization in science fiction against an assault on same from such august

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT

"One thing that I can tell you, Isaac, is that the various folk who have attempted to convert the stories collected in *I Robot* into a movie have, whatever their failings and differences, all focused in not on the Three Laws of Robotics, but on the continuing character of Susan Calvin."

quarters.

But only when I realized that I could make my case using the Good Doctor's own work did I summon up the courage to accept this rather thankless task.

Dr. A was responding to an offhand attack on his powers of characterization in the pages of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* by Rudy Rucker, who had declared en passant that "When you read someone like Asimov, the characters are just interchangeable," and he chose to defend his own work on the grounds that "ideas" are primary in science fiction and "characterization" is at best secondary, using, among other works, his own undeniably successful fiction as examples to prove his thesis.

But I would contend that both Dr. Asimov and Mr. Rucker are wrong; the former in his contention that "ideas" are more important than "characterization" in science fiction, and the latter in his implied contention that the Good Doctor's characters are "interchangeable."

Dr. A declares, "I, however, am anxious to illuminate the human

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

condition . . . not through characters, but through ideas." It seems to me that Isaac is reading the formula for his own success backwards. What he has really done in most of his best-loved work is *illuminate his ideas through the human condition.*

I'm sure that Dr. Asimov would agree that the fiction for which he is best known, the core work of his career, has been the Foundation novels, the "Robot Stories," and the Daneel Olivaw—Lije Bailey novels.

I seem to remember hearing Isaac himself say somewhere that the concept of Hari Seldon's "psychohistory" owes a good deal to the historical theories of Arnold Toynbee. As for an all-human galaxy being an idea of "first-class importance," it seems to me that all it was was a convenient literary device to avoid having to deal with a galaxy full of aliens in a work that was quite complicated enough without them already, thank you!

And yet, I ate these Foundation stories up as a teenager, and they have become generally recognized classics of the genre, despite the fact that the historical weltanshauung was forthrightly cribbed from Toynbee, and the "all human galaxy" was simply a convention he adopted to make telling the story manageable.

Now, twenty years later, how do I remember the original Foundation Trilogy? What is etched in my memory?

Two *characters!* Poor discorporated Hari Seldon babbling his theories confidently in holo even as his deterministic plans were unraveling in realtime, and the Mule, the mutant wild card, the lonely superman, whose random appearance in the timestream confounded the predictions of theory.

Isaac brilliantly encapsulated the themes of his trilogy in two characters whose bizarre existential natures epitomized them not in dry didactic argument but in people you could feel for.

That's what you did there, Isaac.

You illuminated your ideas through your characters.

Now I am quite willing to admit that the "Three Laws of Robotics" are an important idea, indeed an idea so important in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT

the literary history of science fiction that everything written about robots since must either adhere to their strictures, or make a literary point of refuting them.

Yet the Three Laws of Robotics can be stated in three sentences. Which would make only for one very short story, not an entire book-length collection that has become a classic.

One thing that I can tell you, Isaac, is that the various folk who have attempted to convert the stories collected in *I Robot* into a movie have, whatever their failings and differences, all focused in not on the Three Laws of Robotics, but on the continuing character of Susan Calvin.

And what a character she is! As the stories progress, the robots become more and more human, and as the stories progress and she ages, Susan Calvin is revealed as more and more of a cold unemotional intellect, a crabbed creature whose only psychic children, the robots, become more and more emotionally humane, to the point where the title of the collection, *I Robot*, finally achieves an ironic ambiguity which once more sums up the theme by illuminating it through an unforgettable character.

And when Isaac Asimov dealt with what is his deepest and greatest idea, the positive possibilities of a "C/Fe culture," of a true symbiosis between Man and Robot, when we come to the "Lije Bailey—R. Daneel Olivaw" novels, how do we find this idea epitomized?

In the slowly-evolving friendship between Bailey, the human cop portrayed with all his familial problems in convincing detail, and Olivaw, at first his robot rival but in the end a friend worthy of human love, and able to reciprocate it to some extent in his cybernetic manner.

Dr. Asimov has indeed in these novels presented a powerful idea, an idea so powerful that hardly anyone else has dared come near it since, namely that it may be possible for our robotic creations in the end to become deemed worthy of being treated as our spiritual equals as creatures possessed of a soul and capable of caritas.

And he has done this with a mystery format through which he has run two *characters* who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

express the idea to us in very personal terms that touch the human heart.

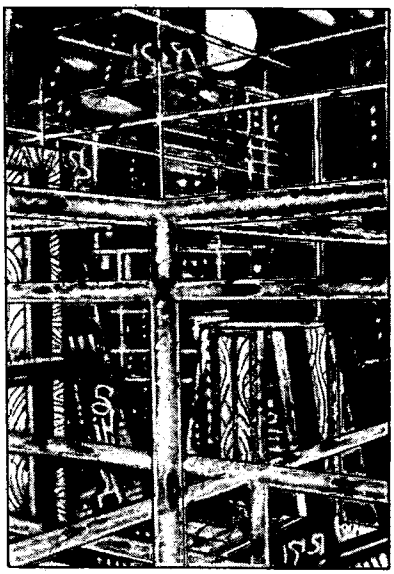
Mr. Rucker, at least as quoted, and Dr. Asimov, in his reading of his own work, are both quite wrong. It is neither "ideas" nor "characterization" which makes or breaks any work of fiction, SF not excluded.

It is "story" which counts for everything.

The plot of a story is simply the sequence of events described, and the characters in a story are simply the people who live through them, the idea, if there is one, is simply the thematic point the writer would like to make.

But a real story, a successful story, a true work of literary art, is all of these things and an essential more. In a real story, the idea is expressed not didactically through exposition but through the human reactions of the characters as they pass through the events of the plot.

The various things that living through events do to the human spirit is, after all, the only possible material for a story, and the only way an idea can be expressed in a manner which will



"While science fiction in particular must be a literature of intellectual speculation, fiction in general must always be about people. It is the genuis of science fiction that it has expanded the concept of "people" to encompass robots and aliens capable of caring for other sentient spirits and therefore possessed of spirits of their own. But if you don't meet anyone you care about in a tale, it really isn't a proper story."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VIEWPOINT

touch the heart as well as the intellect.

Dr. Asimov so rightly states that science fiction is particularly difficult to write. I would go even further and say that successful science fiction is the *most* difficult thing to write precisely because it is the highest possible form of literature.

Yes, it is a literature of ideas like no other, because if a story does not postulate some alteration of accepted contemporary consensus reality, it cannot be science fiction. But if the speculative element is not expressed in the lives of people with whom we can empathize, it ceases to qualify as successful fiction.

While science fiction in particular must be a literature of intellectual speculation, fiction in general, must always be about people. It is the genius of science fiction that it has expanded the concept of "people" to encompass robots and aliens capable of caring for other sentient spirits and therefore possessed of spirits of their own. But if you don't meet anyone you care about in a tale, it really isn't a proper story.

In great science fiction, the ideas touch the intellect, and the characters touch the heart, and what happens to them as they confront the speculatively altered reality brings idea and character, intellect and spirit, together to express a great theme in a well-told story.

In the end, it's all an argument over nothing. Character and idea, psyche and intellect, science and spirit are not opposite, they are complementary. If a science fiction story is devoid of intellectual content, it is not true science fiction. If there are no characters for whom one can feel, it might as well have been an essay.

And if the Good Doctor believes otherwise, I cordially invite him to the pleasure of a careful re-reading of his own best work. ●

AFTER READING SPINRAD'S ESSAY

Dear Norman: I may know a great many things (people always tell me I do), but writing as an art is way down on the list. I always insist on that. Yes, I write successfully—but entirely by instinct. For one thing, I write far too

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quickly to be able to spend time thinking about it.

Consequently, if you say that the characterization in my stories is important and successful, I have no choice but to accept that. (In my heart, I thought that this Rucker person—whoever he may be—might be right, and I had to account for the success of my stories somehow.)

Of course, if it's true that I'm good at characterization, I suppose that would change things, so I'll tell you what, good friend, I'm perfectly willing to leave it as something new to engage the ingenuity of our ingenious readers. Perhaps we can forget the science fiction versus fantasy bit (and the happy ending versus sad ending) for a while, and take up the matter of characterization versus ideas.

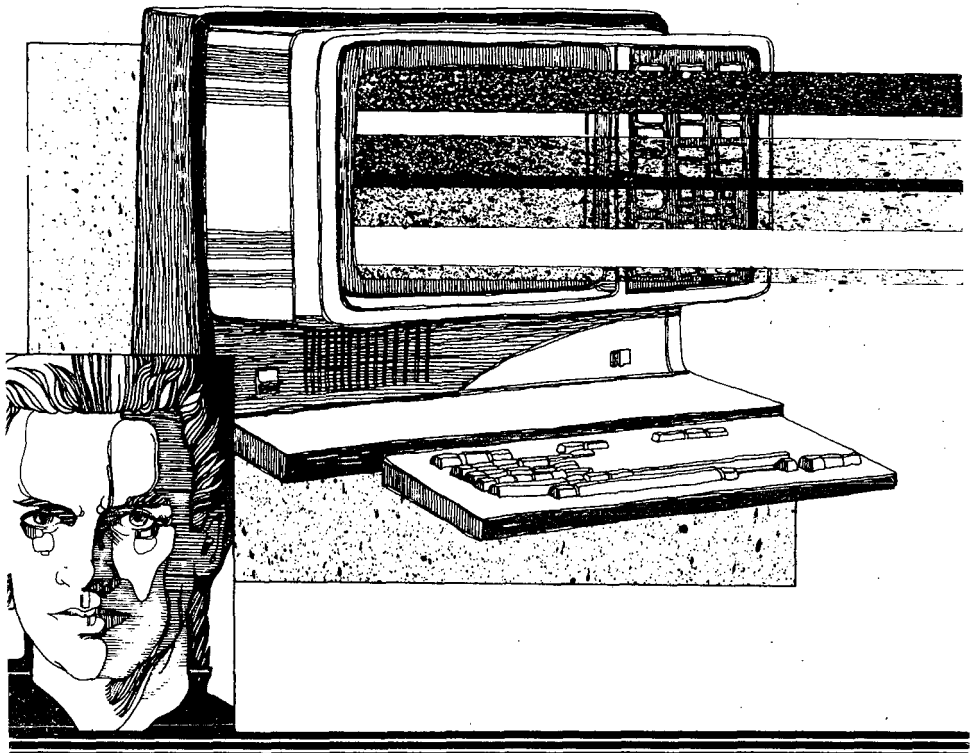
* * *

Which do you look for in science fiction, readers, and which makes you happier.—But please, don't use my stories as examples. Norman's taken care of that. So use someone else's stories, and stories you *like*, please. It's a lot more pleasant to praise people than to call them names.

Address your responses to Viewpoint Poll, % Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, Davis Publications, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

Isaac Asimov

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



MARIE

by Jennifer Swift

art: George Thompson

The author is married
to a philosopher, and teaches
at Berkshire Community College
in Pittsfield, Mass.
This is her second sale to *IAsfm.*
Her first, "The Children's
Teeth are Set On Edge," appeared
in our April 1984 issue.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MEMBER.COMICS.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marie Vinci drank her morning cup of barley coffee and skimmed the headlines on her terminal. "Slow newsday," she said, patting her rounded belly and picturing the fetus within. She knew it was healthy, female, half Oriental, half Caucasian, scarcely as long as her hand, and the weight of a small loaf of bread. But she had to guess its features, and though she knew both parents, she could only imagine its face as a miniature version of Lydia's: wide cheeked, almond-eyed, sweet but querulous.

"Mail," she said, and the headlines on the terminal were replaced by a list of items sent to her since last night: bills, ads, a short review of her latest tape which concluded that her growing popular success was due to the superficial nature of her work. Arrogant bastard. She checked the PERSONAL file again to make sure there was nothing from Piet, then blanked the screen. She rose slowly, but with the ease of long practice. She must not let the events of the past few months prevent her from getting some real work done.

The doorbell buzzed as she entered her studio. Who could it be this early? Perhaps Piet had come back—she turned rapidly, looked through the peephole. She saw a stranger, a young girl, pretty, well-dressed, black. Marie opened the door.

The girl smiled, but her eyes were wary. "Hi," said Marie, trying not to stare at her heart-shaped face and large eyes. Had she seen this girl somewhere before?

"Hello, Mama," said the girl.

Marie shook her head.

The girl put down her small leather suitcase. "I'm Theresa," she said as if that would explain everything. "Theresa Jones; please don't call me 'Terry.' I'm thirteen and an artist like you, only a poet instead of a DREAM maker."

Suddenly Marie understood. "You're number one."

The girl's eyes widened.

"Yes, I recognize you now," Marie assured her. "I just never thought of you . . . as being big." She invited Theresa into her living room. The girl sat on the futon couch, hands stiffly folded in her lap. "My parents are in England for winter break, but they went there without me."

"So they sent you to Seattle?"

The girl leaned forward, smiling shyly. Marie saw the flash of a fashionable gold star on her top right incisor. "You see, my idea is that I could stay here with you while Mommy and Daddy are abroad. I can cook and clean, and I have money saved to pay for my food."

Marie tried not to look as astonished as she felt. "Is this your parents' idea too?"

Theresa's fingers smoothed tiny wrinkles in her midiskirt. "Well, they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said I had to stay with Grandmother in St. Louis, but I told her they said I could stay with you and then I used their access number to buy a plane ticket to Seattle."

Marie suppressed a smile. Obviously there was nothing wrong with the girl's intelligence, despite that obstetrician's claim that labor-accelerating drugs might be needed to prevent an oxygen shortage to the fetus. But she'd insisted on a totally natural delivery, while all around her women giving birth to their own babies screamed for drugs. "And why didn't you contact *me* before showing up here?"

"Didn't you understand my Christmas poem?"

Marie suddenly remembered the poem she'd automatically filed in her surrogate collection, unread. She never did more than skim parents' letters to be sure nothing was wrong. There never was. "Theresa, aren't your parents going to be very worried when they find you're not at your grandmother's?"

The girl's hands clenched into small trembling fists. "But you're my real parent—my womb mother. You carried me under your heart for nine months."

The intensity of the child's conviction was a little frightening. Perhaps she should try reason—wasn't that the best way of dealing with older children who appreciated being treated like adults? "Theresa, anyone can see I'm not your genetic mother, and you must know that from the minute after you were born I had nothing to do with your care. I was just providing a professional service to your parents for a fee." She did not mention the nightmares she'd had for several months after giving birth to Theresa. She had dreamed of being relentlessly followed by someone whose face she could not make herself turn around to see.

"But I'm an artist, just like you, and my parents aren't artistic at all," the girl protested. "They think I flunked math because I spent too much time writing poetry, so they won't listen to it anymore." A bubble of mucus was growing beneath Theresa's nostrils.

Marie felt a sympathetic twinge in her stomach as she thought of her mother's back, always turned away, shoulders hunched before the gray rectangle of the VDT as she processed insurance forms for nine or ten hours per day, while Marie played very quietly in a corner. But really the situations were quite different, and she didn't have the time, energy, or skill to be this child's therapist. "My own mother couldn't spend much time with me because she had to work very hard to support me. I didn't understand until I was older that what she was doing was best for me. Maybe that applies in your case too. Now, how about letting your parents know where you are?"

The girl twisted the tassel on her left boot. "You're not going to tell them I'll be staying with you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How stubborn this child was! Marie decided she had to temporize, no matter how much she disliked people who tried to make her feel she owed them something she didn't. "Just right now I'm terribly busy. I have a tape to finish in four months, before number seven here—" she touched her abdomen "—arrives."

"But I said I could help you." The girl's eyes were wet.

"Look," said Marie, "don't cry. I won't send you away until I've talked to your parents. Is that better?"

Theresa, wiping her eyes with a crumpled tissue, nodded.

"But you have to understand that whatever your parents decide, that's what I'll have to do. I don't have any legal relationship to you."

Marie put Theresa in the spare bedroom and called the number the girl had given her. No one answered, but the Joneses, Drs. Winfield and Vivian, were listed as occupants of the flat, so Marie typed a brief message outlining the situation, ending "please contact me immediately so that transportation to St. Louis can be arranged." She wondered briefly what kind of parents Win and Vivian really were—she hadn't seen them since she moved to Seattle one week after giving birth to Theresa. Probably extraordinarily caring; look at the trouble they'd gone to in order to have their daughter brought into the world.

As she was getting up, the screen brightened and chimed with an incoming call. The Joneses already? "Receive," Marie said. But it was Lydia's beautiful face on the screen.

"How are you feeling this morning, dear?" Lydia herself looked pale; the gold dots of the implants over her nose and at the corners of her eyes stood out sharply. "I'm fine," Marie answered.

"And Alicia—any movements from her?"

"Just the usual light kicking, but don't worry—she didn't keep me awake." Marie had in fact lain awake for over an hour, thinking of that bad review last month in the *Voice*, Lydia's incessant questions about her health, and what Piet might be doing.

"That's good. There's so much to keep you awake." Marie was sure this was a reference to Piet's absence, which upset Lydia mostly because Marie's anxiety could be flooding the fetus with undesirable hormones. "I got some wonderful ripe persimmons at Pike Place yesterday," Lydia was saying. "Why don't I bring some over this afternoon?"

Suddenly Marie realized she didn't want Lydia to know about Theresa. "That's very nice of you, but I'm so behind in my work—"

"But they're so high in vitamin C—"

"I get plenty of that in the fruits and vegetables I eat regularly —remember the diet we worked out? And too much C isn't healthy." Marie permitted herself to speak sharply. Lydia acted as if her prying would enable her to share Marie's pregnancy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So we'll start the breathing exercises on Thursday?" Marie nodded. "Oh, it's going to be so exciting to be your labor coach! I'll pick you up at one-thirty."

More likely I'll be your coach, Marie thought, but she tried to make herself smile. "Bring me some persimmons then." Her hand hit the OFF switch. It was obvious Lydia hated the fact Marie could bring her child to term and she couldn't, her uterus having been deformed by a drug her mother had taken when pregnant. To think she'd once considered Lydia a friend as well as a patron.

She went to her studio before she could be delayed any further, sat down at her main console, and studied the production schedule for *Dead Dog*, her current DREAM tape. She'd recorded the live visual track long ago: crossing a city park, then a busy street; a car coming too fast to dodge; lying limp in a gutter, being placed in a hole and covered with earth, blocking out all light. She'd also recorded the appropriate sensations to accompany the visuals: the clicking of claws on the pavement, a whiff of urine, the taste of vanilla ice cream melted on asphalt, the sun's heat on one's fur, the buzzing of flies. The live visual track was followed by the first animation sequence, which she'd already created and recorded: a cartoon vision of the dog's body—its stilled heart, blood platelets motionless on the floors of arteries, etc. In the last few seconds, a worm appears suddenly from an intestinal wall—a friendly little worm who blinks his eyes shyly—and then the picture dissolves into a whirlpool of color. Now she was at the final and most challenging part of the tape: creating a second animation track to represent decay and transcendence on the molecular level, a sequence she wanted to be not merely clever, but profound.

She was using holographic patterns of colored spheres, based on the illustrations in chemistry texts, their arrangements constantly changing to a suitable musical accompaniment (perhaps Haydn's *Farewell Symphony*) with a medley on the tongue of the four basic flavors. Yesterday she'd finally finished the visual and now she ran a bit of it. Chains and braids of yellow, blue, red, and white spheres appeared, intertwined, broke apart. "Computerized tickling of nerve endings cannot become true art so long as it reaches only after sensational technical feats and does not seek the vital inner core of experience." This would show them.

She lay on her recording couch and plugged fine black wires into the implants at the corners of her eyes. "Run sequence two and record visual," she told the computer, then watched the spheres dance in the tank above the couch. Having repeated this process ten times, she ordered the visual to be played back and closed her eyes. Against the darkness, a handful of scattered spheres appeared, winked on and off. Damn.

So she set up her visual editing and amplification system and began

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the tedious process of making all the spheres visible. She had to be careful not to be misled by her own knowledge of what was supposed to be seen—the nerve impulses sufficient to allow her to see spheres might not be enough for someone who wasn't expecting them. Should she add a voice-over to enhance perception? God no, not a cheap trick like that.

As she worked, she began to think that something was wrong with the sequence—perhaps it was too simple? So she generated random variations, added more colors then edited them out, changed the spheres to cubes and the cubes to pyramids. Nothing worked, and all the while number seven kept bumping her behind the navel.

Theresa's parents, evidently on an all-day excursion, had still not returned Marie's message by dinnertime, so she went back to her studio. Keying in a new program, she noticed her fingers were swollen, so puffy she couldn't remove her wedding ring. More water bloat. My blood pressure must be up. But Piet will be back when it's over. He doesn't understand. I need that visual synthesizer. And I couldn't turn down Lydia and Wyatt forever; they've been so helpful to me. Besides, number seven's positively the last: in a few months I'll be thirty-five and the law won't let me sign a surrogacy contract.

She realized she'd been looking at the glowing lines of a dodecahedron for over twenty minutes. In the living room she found Theresa peeking out the curtains at the dark, rain-slick street below. "When it's clear," Marie said, "or at least when the cloud ceiling is high, you can see the Sound and the lights of downtown. But if you live here, you have to like cloudy skies."

"Oh, I do," Theresa said, "they're poetic. Everything under them looks soft and hazy."

"To some people they're damned depressing."

"It's the bright sun, like in Texas, that I hate. You have to scrunch up your eyes and everything is glary. I wish I was a better person, Marie, more grown-up."

Marie was so surprised she almost forgot how much the girl's presence annoyed her. "Why, Theresa?"

"Because then maybe my parents would let me eat dinner in the dining room with them, instead of in the kitchen with the housekeeper."

Poor little rich girl, thought Marie. Still, it reminded her uncomfortably of the many nights she'd silently put food by her mother's terminal, then eaten her own dinner alone in the kitchen. "Do you want me to mention that to your parents?"

"I want to stay here with you!" Theresa's hands were clenching again.

"Is living with your parents that bad? Or is it they don't fit your image of perfect parents?"

"You don't care about me either!" Theresa pushed past her, locked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

herself inside the bathroom. Marie heard the sound of running water, then muffled sobbing. Standing in front of the closed door, she told herself it was just as well, that now the girl would be willing to leave, that if she was angry at Theresa a moment ago it made no sense to be hurt by her rejection now.

She made herself return to her console. The dodecahedron was still there, rotating slowly in the tank. How banal. She realized there was a sharp pain behind her right eye and automatically reached to unplug the lead. It wasn't there.

She blinked, frowned, but the pain didn't go away. Now she could feel it in the back of her skull too. She got up to go to bed. Wait a minute. Bloating and headache in mid-pregnancy. She sat down at her terminal again and called up her medical files. "Preeclampsia, also called toxemia: an illness of pregnancy marked by high blood pressure, the appearance of protein in the urine, and fluid retention. If allowed to progress, the placenta will fail and the baby will be born prematurely. Other symptoms: headache, flashing lights, nausea . . ." Marie got her sphygmomanometer and found her blood pressure was 150/100. Not far from the criterion for severe preeclampsia, 160/110, for which her program mandated bed rest and constant monitoring, preferably in a hospital. But she decided to rest at home, lowering her blood pressure on her own. As far as she could tell from the computer that was all a physician could prescribe for her to do now.

And if she told the obstetrician, he'd surely tell Lydia, and she'd have to spend all four months until the birth in bed, no matter how low her blood pressure got, probably with Lydia reading soothing stories to her.

She went to bed immediately, but lay awake. What had happened to Theresa's parents? Had her treatment of the girl been unfair? If only Piet were here—he was so good with children. But it was because of the child she carried now that he wasn't here.

The next morning the Joneses had still not replied and she almost contacted the British police, then decided to wait until the afternoon—her blood pressure was down since last night, but not by much. She returned to bed, put on earphones, and sorted through the collection of music chips. This was unhelpful: either she'd heard the pieces a hundred times before or they were ones that Piet had bought, mostly strange-sounding twentieth century European composers. If he came by to collect them, maybe she could persuade him to move back in. He'd said he couldn't understand why she valued Lydia and a new synthesizer more than him.

She pulled off the earphones and dumped the chips back into their box. Working on *Dead Dog* would surely lower her blood pressure faster than this kind of "resting." She maneuvered her legs over the side of the bed, reached for her slippers. Actually he was right: it wasn't for the new

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

equipment or even Lydia. It was because her name was now linked with Noguchi and Diaz, because someone wanted to mass-market her tapes, because Hollywood wanted an ordinary animation of *The Blue Room Sleeps*. Everyone was watching her now for the first slip. That's ugly, Marie—can't you draw anything pretty for Mommy? But pregnancy held her to the mundane here-and-now, to the center. Not her own child, she wasn't ready yet. With someone else's, it was just her body changing, but with her own—

The terminal beside the bed chimed. It wasn't Theresa's parents, but Lydia making her usual morning call. "You're still in bed—is everything all right, dear?"

"I just feel a little tired, and I don't want to push myself."

"Anything else unusual?"

"No, nothing, dear—and if you don't mind, I'll just get back to my nap." And Marie cut the connection though Lydia was opening her mouth. Immediately the screen went white and chimed again.

"Ms. Vinci?" It was finally Vivian Jones, looking anxious but not much older than fifteen years ago when she'd taught Marie's modern art class. They'd become friends, and when Marie had learned Vivian was unable to find an acceptable surrogate at an affordable price, she'd volunteered. She remembered the sense of triumph she'd felt when the midwife put number one in her arms and she'd seen the tiny body was complete and perfectly formed, the eyes open and looking toward her. She'd known at that moment that she could accomplish anything, anything. "I'm so sorry about Terry," Vivian was saying, "Win and I never imagined she'd do something so irresponsible." Marie saw now that Vivian's hair was just beginning to gray and that there were crow's-feet at the corners of her eyes. No implants though, she noted automatically. "I'm going to have her uncle Steve in Corvallis come up and make sure she gets on the plane to St. Louis as soon as possible. We hope she didn't cause you much inconvenience."

Marie thought of her blood pressure. But the computer had said pre-eclampsia wasn't caused by psychological circumstances. "Not really, I guess."

"And how are you, Marie? I've heard your tapes are doing well. Would that be your first on the way?"

Marie felt her face grow hot. "No, my final contract. Mostly a favor to a friend really."

"I'm sorry—I saw your wedding ring and assumed—"

"It's true most surrogates have children of their own." Agencies wouldn't take on a childless woman because they assumed you couldn't resist keeping the kid, but Marie was free-lance.

"Well, I'm sure you'll bring that couple as much happiness as you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brought us." Marie could see no sarcasm in Vivian's face, but she remembered how you could never tell from Vivian's lectures which artists she really liked. She heard herself asking, "Hm, Theresa said something about having to eat in the kitchen."

Vivian frowned, looked away. There was a mantelpiece beside her, the bright brass of an anniversary clock at its center. "Only when we're entertaining or those times Win and I have to talk to each other alone. But, yes, we know Terry has problems. She's been seeing the counselor at her school, but evidently he's not helped her much. As soon as she's back in St. Louis, I'll have her grandmother take her to the best specialist there."

The flawlessly correct answer of the concerned parent, Marie thought. But whether or not it's my business, I'd like to know what she feels for her daughter. "Theresa seemed lonely."

"Early adolescence is a difficult time."

It seemed Vivian was unwilling to share her knowledge of Theresa's "problems." There was really only one more question Marie felt she could ask: "Theresa complained that you didn't listen to her poetry."

Vivian chuckled, a sound like cool bubbling water. "Our Terry prefers things that come easy for her. We decided not to encourage her verbal flights of fancy until she applies herself to her math."

So Vivian didn't fit Marie's personal ideal of motherhood—but she'd survived worse than this.

"I'm afraid I'd better be calling Steven. Good-bye, Marie." With a brief smile, Vivian cut their connection. Marie did not have a chance to get in another word. What else could she do but return the girl anyway?

There was a light knocking on the bedroom door. "Come in, Theresa." Had the girl overheard?

Theresa's frown was a younger version of Vivian's. "Did my parents call?"

"Your mother did."

"Was she mad?"

"I don't think so, but she wasn't happy." Marie folded her hands on her abdomen. "What happens when they're mad at you?"

"I have to stay in my room. And if they're really angry, I have to see Mr. Vandeberg, my counselor."

"What does he think of the way your parents treat you?"

"Oh, *he* thinks it's okay. You know, I never told him about you—my parents want to keep it a secret."

Marie was fussing with the sash of her robe, twisting it into a giant pink umbilical cord. "Theresa, what I'd really like to know is if you think your parents mistreat you."

The girl crouched down by Marie's feet. "They just can't understand

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me." She picked at the carpet with her fingers. "I think it's because I have a creative nature like you, but all they care about is math and grades."

Marie dropped her sash, watched it uncoil. "Like I said, I don't have any legal relationship to you. If I were to keep you here, your parents could have me arrested." She stood up. "Your mother's sending your Uncle Steve to put you on a plane as soon as possible."

Theresa was still digging at the carpet. "But it's really only because they're making you send me back, right?"

"I'm beginning to think your mother was right when she said you'd rather live in a fantasy world."

The girl looked up. "But isn't that what art is for?"

"No. Art should guide you back to reality."

"So I guess you don't want me."

Marie walked to the door, put her hand on the knob. "Theresa, I'm not going to let you play games with me."

The girl was silent for a long moment, and Marie feared she was going to cry. Instead she got to her feet. "Do you know a guy named Piet?"

"Yes, he's my husband. He's—away on a trip now."

"He wants you to call him. I saw the message in your electronic mail."

Marie went to her studio. It was noon and Piet was probably at that little Vietnamese restaurant on Queen Anne Hill. The proprietor recognized her and, before she could say anything, brought Piet to the phone. A window behind him made visual reception poor: all she could see were his broad shoulders and head silhouetted against a bright square of light.

"Marie."

Just hearing his voice made her face hot. "You wanted me?"

"I just thought I'd like to know if you were all right."

Her reply was sharper than she wanted it to be. "Of course I'm fine." She didn't want her hypertension to force him back; she wanted him to return of his own free will.

"That's good." Was his tone ironic?

"How about you?"

"Oh, more of the same: fingerpaints in the hair, clay stuck on the ceiling."

Marie said what she suddenly felt like saying: "Baby, this is just plain ridiculous. Why don't you come home?"

His shoulders moved and she turned up the light gain but she still couldn't make out his expression. "When you admit how inconsiderate this is to me—"

Marie grew impatient. "It's my uterus, not yours."

"Yes, but sometimes I wonder if you're not addicted to this business of having other people's babies—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's a goddamn lie—" Her hand hit the OFF switch. No, she told herself, that therapist guaranteed I was cured three years ago. I wouldn't have married you otherwise, and you didn't have to know about something that was in the past. But he's guessed, she thought, he knows what an idiot weakling I am, that I couldn't resist another pregnancy fix. She realized her face was wet with tears. To hell with it.

She decided not to take her blood pressure just now; it was surely atypically high. Instead she lay down on her couch, plugged in the leads, and played through *Dead Dog*. But even the earlier, complete parts did not satisfy her. There were some technical problems: the scents the dog sniffed—urine, asphalt, vanilla ice cream—were not convincingly redolent, and the trotting of the four legs had an unnatural syncopated rhythm—probably a feedback echo. But that wasn't all. She'd meant to make a statement about death that was honest yet optimistic. But maybe it didn't matter that your body's molecules grew into flowers—something that wasn't atoms was lost and could never be replaced. She thought of her father, dead before she was born.

She forced herself to concentrate on remedying the motion of the dog's legs. But after supper, when she finally took her blood pressure, it was no lower than last night—in fact, the diastolic had risen by five. She knew that she couldn't put it off any longer, that she must call the obstetrician's emergency number tonight, but first she would lie down for a few minutes because she was too tired to think.

She was not sure afterwards whether or not she slept. As she hovered in that half-conscious state just before sleep, there was someone she had to find, she couldn't remember whom, but it held her back so that she could not give herself up to sleep.

Someone with big knuckles was rapping hard on her bedroom door. She sat up too suddenly, felt a stitch in her side as she strained her abdominals, fumbled for the bedside lamp, realized it was still lit.

"It's Steven Jones, Ma'am," said a strange male voice and then she heard Theresa: "Uncle Steve says I have to go away to St. Louis."

"Good grief, what time is it?" But her bedside terminal told her: 12:02 A.M. She pulled on a robe.

Steven Jones was tall, very dark-skinned, with big joints and tired eyes. He said the best thing to do would be to put Theresa on the five A.M. flight. A graduate student at Oregon State, he was scheduled to take his prelims on Thursday, so he had to return to Corvallis as soon as possible. Theresa seemed fond of him, but she was not about to go along. "I'm taking care of Marie, don't you understand? She's going to have a baby, another surrogate baby."

Her uncle was embarrassed, but Marie nodded. Then she found herself suddenly embraced by two thin brown arms. "I have to take real good

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

care of her because her husband's away on a trip and there's no one else to help her." Marie felt wetness forming under her buttocks, soaking the bottom of her robe. She realized what had kept her from truly sleeping. "Theresa," she said, "you'll have to go with your Uncle Steve. I think I may be having this baby very soon." She began counting the length of the contractions—if they lasted forty seconds or longer, labor could not be halted and the fetus would be born sixteen weeks premature.

Steve looked frightened, but Theresa continued to embrace Marie. "It's a little girl, isn't it, Marie?"

"Yes, but if she's born now, she might be too little to survive by herself." There it was, out. The others were silent, Theresa hugged her tighter.

"Ma'am," Steve finally said, "if you'd like me to I can take you to the hospital—probably just as fast as an ambulance and cheaper."

"Thanks. Theresa, why don't you get your suitcase while I dress?"

When she got up from the chair, there was a puddle on the vinyl.

As she changed into a smock and drawstring pants, she timed her contractions by the bedside terminal's clock—yes, they were already forty seconds long. How could her labor have started so early? Her blood pressure had been normal—was it only ten days ago? She sent a message to Dr. Kouska, and then, forcing herself to punch the numbers, called Lydia. She answered instantly. "I couldn't sleep tonight, Marie. I knew something was wrong. I just sat in the living room and tried to send my strength out to my child."

She could not meet Lydia's eyes. "I think I've started labor. The waters have broken and my contractions are about forty seconds long and coming closer together. I guess it will have to be a hospital delivery."

Lydia seemed anxious but not surprised. "I have a labor kit all ready for us."

Steve hovered at Marie's elbow as she went down the stairs to his car. "Pardon me, I know it's none of my business," he said, "but you've had more than one surrogate child?"

"Yes." She found she didn't want to say seven.

"What I wondered is how anyone could go through that repeatedly. I don't mean to say it's bad or wrong, but don't you sometimes wonder what your children are doing, if they're being brought up okay, stuff like that?"

"They're not my children."

It was wet outside with the typical Seattle rain: fine droplets of water seemed to hang suspended in the air. Marie lay down in the back seat and watched the dark heads of Steve and Theresa and beyond them the rain-smeared windshield and the streetlights of University Avenue flashing over her one at a time.

Steve drove well, though he kept up a constant stream of chatter about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trees and how the oxygen they produced kept the world from suffocating. His soft voice and the regular tightening of the belt of muscles around her abdomen soothed her, so that her worries lacked emotional force. The fetus might die. It might be seriously handicapped. Lydia and Wyatt might refuse to pay. They might stop carrying her tapes. It was Lydia's fault: she'd continually harassed her, probably driven up her blood pressure, scared away Piet. Good to give birth, get it over with now. She wouldn't even mind if it had to be Caesarean, her record was spoiled already.

Suddenly there was a bump and they stopped. She sat up, saw a paramedic rolling a stretcher toward their car. "No, I can walk. Premature labor. Thanks, Steve. Good-bye, Theresa."

The girl pushed something into her hand, a many-times-folded piece of paper. "A poem," she whispered. "Good-bye, Marie. I hope the little girl will be all right."

Lydia was there and stood by as Dr. Kouska examined Marie. "There's no way to stop labor now," he said, "you're already three and a half centimeters dilated. But the fetal heart is strong."

"How can my labor be this fast?" Marie demanded. "I never had one this sudden before."

His big hand rested on her shoulders. "A rapidly escalating hypertension isn't unknown in surrogates, especially multiparas."

He turned Marie over to a nurse-midwife to prep her for labor. As the midwife cleansed her perineum, he looked up between her sheet-draped knees and asked, "Marie Vinci—are you the one who did the *Carrot-Banana Cakewalk*?" She noticed the gold dots of implants over his nose and beside his eyes.

"She certainly is," Lydia said. "You have a distinguished patient here."

Yeah, Marie thought, having a well-known artist as your surrogate gives real cachet.

"I sure did enjoy that part in the middle when the cakes in the bakery join hands and dance in a circle in the moonlight," the midwife said. "Could you fill this, please?" He put a urine sample cup in her hand. As she went to the restroom, he said to Lydia, "I have all the Nikki St. Ives *Eros Unbound* tapes too."

As Marie pushed the flush lever, she realized there was a wad of paper in her hand, damp with sweat. She dropped it in the toilet, and as it sank suddenly remembered it was Theresa's poem. She reached down to retrieve it, but the whirling water sucked it away.

As the midwife palpated her abdomen to determine the position of the fetus, Marie said to Lydia, "This is all so sudden. My blood pressure was normal last week." Not last night though. But she couldn't say that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aloud, not yet. She must soon or else she'd be acting like someone who'd done something wrong.

"I thought all my pregnancies were perfect too," Lydia said, "until I miscarried every time in the third month." She looked down at Marie with a faint smile. Was she perhaps a bit pleased to know that Marie's reproductive apparatus was also imperfect?

"Left occipito anterior, that's just right," said the midwife. But wasn't there a flatness in his voice? "And now we'll block that pain." He began attaching studs to the implants along Marie's lower spine. She sighed with relief; though she could still feel the pressure of contraction waves, their biting edge was absent. "Okay, I'm taking you down to the Pink Room for the rest of your labor."

The Pink Room was indeed pink, with pink walls, a pink satin quilt on the brass bed, and dotted Swiss curtains framing a moving hologram of Mt. Rainier seen from the Paradise Trail. Flowers bowed in the breeze and bright sunshine filled the blue sky. "You'd think they could coordinate the time of day and season with the real world," said Lydia.

"Spring is more cheerful," said the midwife. "It's always spring in this room." He reached up Marie's vagina with gloved fingers. "You're dilated four and a half now and thinning out well. You're tense though and you haven't been breathing in sequence. If this lady can't help, I—"

"I am her labor coach," said Lydia firmly.

After the midwife had left, Marie said, "But we haven't ever practiced together." She was well aware of how shaky and irregular her breathing was. This was going to be a botched birth, not the consummately professional culmination she'd foreseen. She had to get control of herself, but she couldn't stop the tears running down her face.

Lydia had plumped the pillows on the bed and was sitting against them, back straight. "Marie, come sit in front of me and we can breathe together. I've been practicing at home with Wyatt."

Amateurs, Marie thought, but she climbed onto the bed and sat, her back to Lydia's front, not quite touching. Lydia rested her hands on Marie's melon-shaped abdomen. The fetal monitor queeped reassuringly from behind the curtains. "You're having a contraction now, dear, right?" Marie nodded, her tears sticky on her cheeks. "Remember, breathe out slowly, slowly. Good, now a nice slow resting breath—that's wonderful. Not that I should be telling you." Lydia's bosom jiggled against Marie's back as she chuckled. She had a faint, expensive scent, and Marie was acutely aware of the sweat coating her own body. She'd always been able to take a shower before. Was this really happening to her? Lydia's hands were warm on her belly.

"That's it: in, out, in, out."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She was between contractions now. "Lydia, I have to tell you something."

"Yes, dear?"

"If anything's wrong with the baby, I mean—if—"

"I understand."

"I think I may have—" She couldn't force words through the knot in her throat.

"Pay attention to your body, not your head, Marie. In. Out."

"You're being so good to me."

"Thank you. In. Out."

"I mean I took my blood pressure last night and it was high and I went to bed but I didn't call the doctor—" Pressure was building so strongly around her abdomen that she had to stop and breathe out as she should.

"Let those shoulders unstiffen—better. Out now, gently."

"I tried to stay in bed, really I did, but I kept getting interrupted. I tried to relax, but no one would let me."

"You certainly aren't relaxed now—let's go over this later, Marie. Right now I just want you to breathe properly."

"But you're not mad at me?"

"I don't want my baby to have a tense mother, Marie. Oh my, that's a good breath."

Marie's legs suddenly felt cold. "I'm in transition already." She clenched her jaw against the chill and brief wave of nausea. She could feel the head of the fetus, round and solid like a grapefruit, pressing down against her anus. It seemed no smaller than the others. "Remember, we breathe more lightly now."

A moment later, Dr. Kouska and the midwife were there, putting her on a gurney, wheeling her into the high-risk delivery room. She had a brief impression of stainless steel and bright lights, but she could feel the fetus moving down her vagina and there was nothing else in the world but the need to push.

"She's crowning," someone said. "Breathe her out."

"Ah!" said a chorus of voices. Marie saw a dark red body, tiny in the doctor's hands. Limp as a rag doll, it breathed with quick grunts, its chest collapsing after each effort. Marie saw that it was not a real human baby, just a clever but flawed simulacrum. When the doctor held it out for her to touch, she shook her head. It did not disturb her to hear talk of catheters and oxygen. The only time she felt anything was when the midwife pushed firmly down on her abdomen as he pulled the umbilical cord—she was sure she felt a sharp pain as the placenta peeled away from the walls of her uterus. But with the implants, that pain had to be imaginary.

She slept for a long time.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When she woke, she did not know where she was. But her whole body was filled with the tranquility of an exquisite fatigue, and she seemed to float in the bed rather than lie in it. Nothing worried her. This is what I've always wanted, she thought. But when she finally opened her eyes, she found herself in a curiously impersonal sort of bedroom. What am I doing in a motel? And where's Piet? Then she saw the row of stainless steel sockets on the wall above her head and remembered.

Was that tiny red baby, number seven, still alive? And what was Lydia thinking about her? It was remarkable how well she'd assisted Marie in labor. Oh no, she realized, I told her that I didn't call the doctor right away. My god. Well, I don't think she can sue me and win, whatever she may try. What a goddamn mess I made of this whole thing. I just hope the fetus, I mean baby, is all right; then they'll leave me alone and I can forget.

The window beside her bed was false, like the window in the labor room, only instead of Mt. Rainier this one had a hologram of the Sound. Tiny flags on the buildings along the shore seemed to be whipping in the breeze, but the sky could not be that pure empty blue in midwinter. She heard the latch of the door click and saw the handle move up as someone turned it on the other side. It was Lydia, dark circles under her eyes, lips pressed in a firm line. Wyatt followed her, a blind man whose artificial eyes, tiny spherical TV cameras mounted in his eye sockets, made his face seem a mask.

Lydia walked directly to her bedside and bent down over Marie. "Alicia died," she said. "Her lungs were grossly immature and she had a Class IV brain hemorrhage."

Marie nodded woodenly. She felt no sorrow, but that only made her responsibility for what had happened seem greater. "Dr. Kouska said it wasn't just the preeclampsia; your cervix has become incompetent—it can't hold a baby to term anymore." She straightened up. "Would you like to see Alicia?"

Marie looked down at the sheet covering her breasts. A real image of death, put it in the tape. No, not an image. She shook her head.

"But the doctors all say it's very therapeutic. Well, if you won't, I just want you to know we appreciate what you tried to do for us and wish you a speedy recovery." She turned away and walked out the door. But Wyatt remained at the foot of Marie's bed.

The ventilator was whining softly in one corner and Marie plucked at the white cotton sheet.

"You can still have kids, you know," Wyatt said abruptly. "Dr. Kouska told us stitches can be put in and removed just before delivery." His eyes moved toward her face, more slowly than real eyes would.

Marie felt tears flood hers, but of relief, not sorrow. "I feel so awful

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

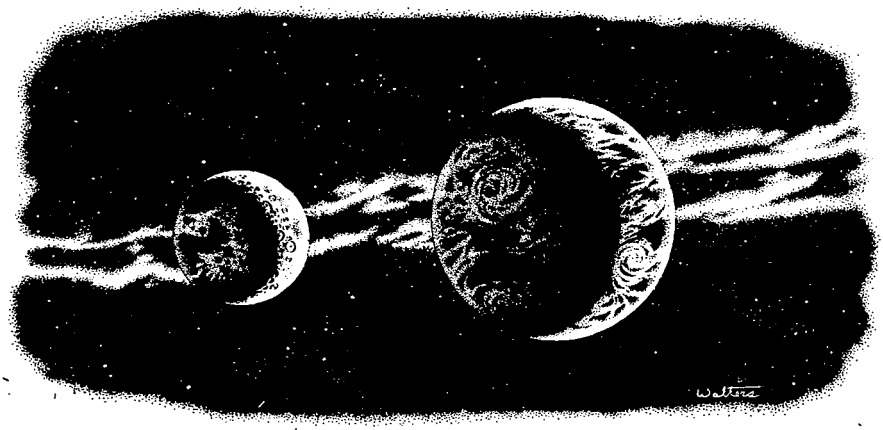
that I let you down." The words sounded dry and insincere though she meant them.

His beefy hands shifted uneasily on the railing of her bed. "I never quite believed it was going to work . . . maybe we'll try adoption. Goodbye."

"I'm sorry," she whispered as he left. In the window, a grain freighter was moving across the blue waters of the Sound, going west toward Asia. Suddenly she wanted to smash that lying picture that could be so sunny when someone had died, a baby, Alicia. Though she felt extremely weak, she forced herself to sit up, push the sheet away, carefully place her feet on the floor. She put a hand on the wall to support herself and shuffled toward the window, looking for the switch that would turn it off. But the closer she got, the more impressed she was by its exquisite accuracy. The colors were pure and deep; no scanning stria could be seen. How had they done it? The picture had all the clean, hard lines of reality.

But when she touched the window and felt its cold glass vibrate with the wind, she knew there really was a blue sky over Seattle this January afternoon. She sank to her knees, looking across the Sound to the Olympics floating on the other side. They were like beautiful and cruel white teeth. She rested her chin on the sill and gazed at them until her eyes stung and the mountains blurred and melted into broken white shapes.

Finally she pulled herself up again, shuffled back to bed, carefully wrapped the yellow blanket from the foot of her bed around her shoulders, then swung the bedside terminal over her lap. Where was Piet now? When she saw his face on the screen, she'd say, "I've lost my child." ●



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

art: Arthur George

by Damon Knight

A FANTASY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Damon Knight last appeared
in our Mid-December 1984 issue
with "The Very Objectionable Mr. Clegg." He returns with a
very short and rather wistful
look at the way the world really ought to be.

The gray-faced little man came up to me in the Mall; he was wearing a costume like that of the Messenger in *Through the Looking Glass*: that is, tunic, tabard, tights, and a close-fitting hood, the difference being that the Messenger's hood was pierced for his rabbit ears, and this little person had, instead, plastic-topped antennae made of coil springs that wobbled as he moved. His face was the bluish gray of calsomine; it looked painted on, an impression heightened by the pink rims of his eyelids and the faint yellowness of his teeth. "Sir," he said, holding out a microphone, "would you be kind enough to answer a few questions? What is your opinion of the magazine *Cosmopolitan*?"

"It hit its peak in the thirties," I said.

"Why was that, sir?"

"It had an editor who was interested in fiction and willing to pay for it."

"Who was that editor, sir?"

"His name was Ray Long."

"Are you sure? Do you want to change your mind?"

"No, I'll go with that."

"You're *right!*" the little man shrieked. "For one hundred dollars! Congratulations, Mr.—"

"Knight," I said, as he pressed a crisp new bill into my hand.

"Mr. Knight, how did you happen to know the answer to that question?"

"I knew it because my stepson, Richard Wilhelm, found a nineteen twenty-nine issue of *Cosmopolitan* in a barn and gave it to me."

"Your *stepson* Richard Wilhelm found it in a *barn* and gave it to you? Mr. Knight, do you realize what you have just done? You have just said two of the secret words, 'stepson' and 'barn,' for two thousand dollars! What is your stepson's full name, if I may ask?"

"His name is Richard Balmann Wilhelm," I said.

"Balmann!" cried the little man in ecstasy. "Oh, you're not going to believe this, folks. 'Balmann' is the *third* secret word, and you, Mr. Knight, have just won a trip around the world for two and an income of fifty thousand dollars a year for life!"

Thus in the just world, which is hard to find even when you know the way. What the "real" world is like I need not remind you. ●

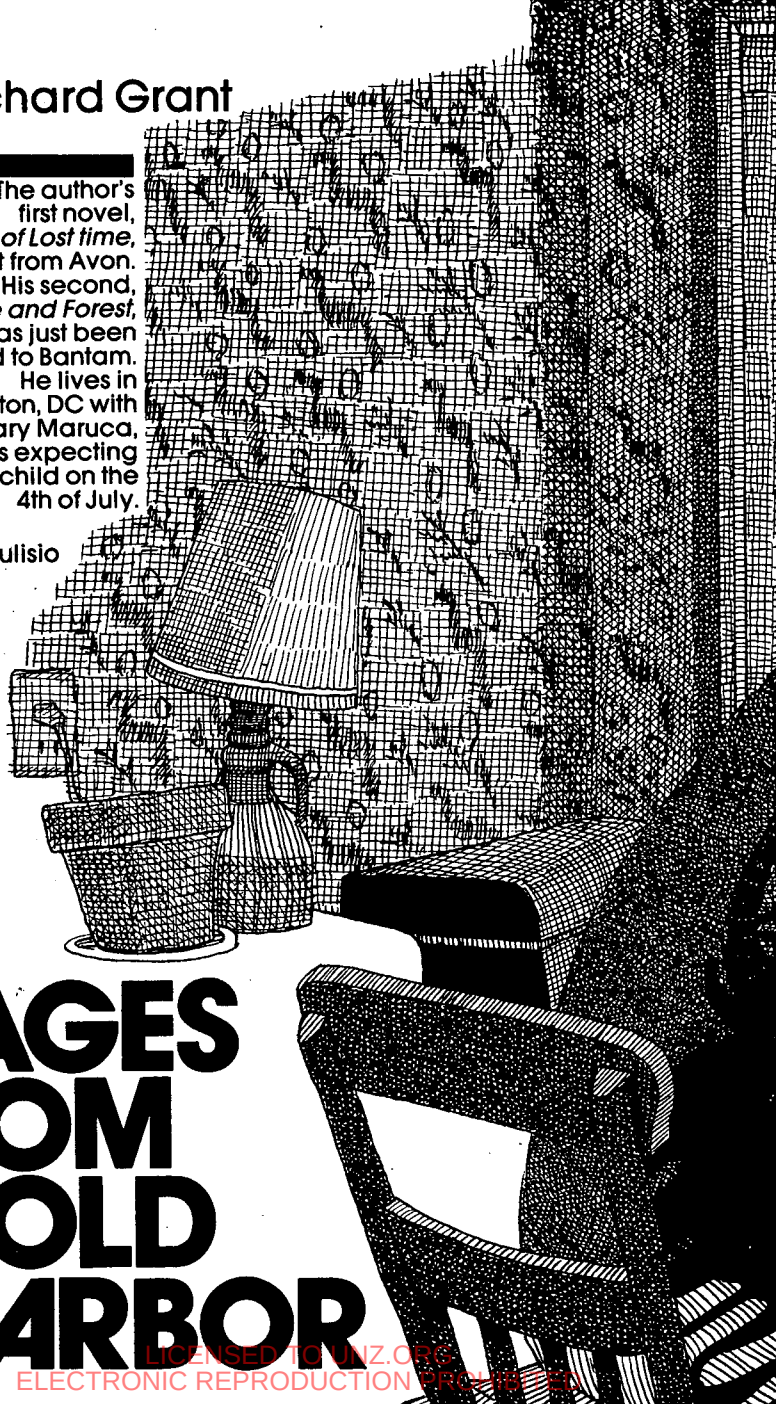
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PAGES FROM COLD HARBOR

by Richard Grant

The author's first novel, *Saraband of Lost time*, is just out from Avon. His second, *Prelude and Forest*, has just been sold to Bantam. He lives in Washington, DC with his wife Mary Maruca, who is expecting a child on the 4th of July.

art: Janet Aulisio



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Christmas morning I wake early, shivering by the dead fire, and go out dragging my feet through oil-blackened sand down the long-deserted beach of Cold Harbor. A chill breeze blows steadily over the sea, carrying gull cries and the faint smell of rot. Along the beach between weedy clumps of marshgrass, dead horseshoe crabs and small misshapen fish lie abandoned by the tides. Here and there are mucid gray globs of something vaguely organic, as if the sea is heaving up clotted bits of itself in an agony of decay. Enduring this walk seems a kind of obligation for me. There are no other people about on this holiday morning; scarcely other living things at all.

At last I come home to the box. My coffin-shaped Christmas present. Which for a week has lain unopened in this gray-shingled monument to dead vacationers, while I have tried not to guess what lies inside. To be honest, the origin of the thing disturbs me more than any thought of its contents. There is no return address, but her handwriting was always distinctive. She has painted my name on its lid.

Resolved to lay the ghost of my misgivings, I traipse through the house looking for a tool to have it open. All I find are tiny appliances meant for probing the delicate engines of my trade. At length I settle on a butcher knife. Dripping gray water from the sink across the grimy yellow linoleum, I weave my way through empty cartons and stacks of books to confront, at last, the coffin. Having put it off this long, I fall to prying at the lid with unaccountable eagerness. At last, with a kind of groan, it comes away.

Soft blue cloth lies beneath. Robin's-egg blue. The knife somehow catches on this and, despite my efforts to ease it back gently, rips. I bend to look, and the room grows suddenly warmer.

Down a creaseless forehead falls soft, sunlightened brown . . . if not hair then so close a thing to hair that its warm fragrance seems to reach my nostrils. And yes, limpid untroubled eyes, also brown. The golden artificial skin of the cheeks exudes just faint enough a glow of pink to frame a similarly tinted, palely freckled, firm but slightly upturned nose. The mouth, fractionally ajar, cannily displays snow-colored straight teeth, hard as the slightly pouting lips are soft. Unexceptionably the chin is set. Inlaid the length of the neck runs the slender throat—so real that again one feels the warmth, and wearing like a gem the cartilaginous adolescent-sized adam's apple. Which does not bob or flutter, however long I stare with indrawn breath. The shoulders are finely sculpted, bones hinted at beneath this curving skinsoft expanse where real muscles must, it seems, lie dormant. The chest, brown-nippled and smooth, will surely heave if I watch closely. No? There is a slight dropoff at the ribcage to an abdomen punctuated—nice touch—by a barely flawed, asymmetric navel. The sign of a troubled birth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And just as I discern the downsoft, dark brown ant-caravan of hair marching down the belly below—before I turn away out of murky, misplaced bashfulness, or possibly alarm—a single drop of dishwater falls from the trembling knife. Christening, and sullying, this astonishing present. Which for years I have awaited with equal measures of longing and dread.

I think I will call him Jeremy.

Life at midwinter is at its furthest ebb from Cold Harbor. Thus far I have avoided any acknowledgement or expression of thanks for the thing that has become the focus of my work. But she must know, I reason; she must certainly understand. How else could she have fashioned it so . . . exactly? Anyway I should not begin to know what to say. It has been so very long.

These thoughts recede as I climb the two flights to the faded pink once-nursery of my home, with its purple rhinoceros on the wall and stacks of whispering machinery. And a voice says:

"Good morning."

That voice. Weeks of work in years past, it sits perched on the edge of the steep slide to manhood: the upper register quivering slightly, the glottal undertones just sketched in. And now it has a home.

"Lights, please," I say softly.

The murky ooze from seaward, filtered through small windows translucent with saltspray, is warmed by an incandescence of roomlights. Humble feat, this: a ribbon cord maintains a sixty-four-bit interface between the main control circuitry and the pale blue josephson junctionbox in its cranial nest. Two mounds of sunlightened hair, weirdly asunder, yield access to the intricate cavity beneath, where fluids course through false flesh that looks so warm. I sit before cool video units, multicolored and impassive, and begin my god-mocking work.

The winter sun rises in the sky, anemic, brightening the haze at the windows, and the roomlights dim to compensate. Impassively my hands perform their chores, probing soft and intimate at the smooth pliant skin of the thing sitting back-turned on a box, its head cracked open where the cord goes in. The supercooling pumps vent heat through its nostrils (a clever arrangement, I think—though the quietly hissing air does not sound quite like breath) and the grosser body components dissipate warmth evenly through the skinlike surface.

By noon I have completed the final tests. Almost unthinkingly I sever the cord, snap shut the cranium, fluff the hair. I note with dispassion the appropriate temperature diffusing from the heatsink millimeters below, and say, "All right, stand up and turn to the left, please."

And all by itself, for the first time, the boylike machine calmly rises.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Its muscles stir with eerie precision, making perfect bulges and declivities as it turns—some awkwardness there with the feet—to face me. Its eyes flash in the gray oceanlight. The chest and abdomen move steadily. A bit hurriedly perhaps; but even that seems oddly right. And only then, as the ghost of an expression makes a first flicker over its features—the remarkably sculpted, puckish face forming small transient wrinkles, and the cooling system for no evident reason sounding much more breath-like—only then do I begin to tremble.

For I know this beautiful machine is no boy. Its seven-gigabyte brain is cold beyond the imaginings of soft gray flesh, and uncolored by the chemistry of emotion. Its silent thoughts are crystalline and pure.

Yet he stands before me, smiling.

His joints, painstakingly engineered, are almost perfect. A bit too much lateral swiveling at the knees, though even human bodies vary somewhat, one to another. The hips, on the other hand, are a bit stiff. Forward and backward, kicking-style, they bend quite freely, but sideways—from what I can see at this distance, through lenses fouled by saltspray—there appears some difficulty. Childhood paralysis not quite overcome, one could explain, if asked. But perhaps only a father would notice.

Anyway, we have this morning the beach to ourselves. For who would venture out to these jetties, clutching like weary fingers at what sand remains to make a beach of Cold Harbor? The March drizzle is borne by bitter ocean-driven shafts of air through one's clothing and into one's pores. Though the boy, of course, has no pores; the wetness gathers and makes rivulets down his resilient skin, collecting in his mail-order shoes.

Distracted by my thoughts, I fail to notice that the boy has entered the water. This stretches, nearly contravenes, the rigid mandate of self-protection so laboriously programmed into him. Up to his thighs now, he doesn't splash or shout but merely stands there, savoring in his supercold rational way the unaccustomed sensation of the icy current. Gray-green water gushes past him through moss-covered rocks to crash against the shore. I cry out.

"Jeremy! Here. That's very dangerous."

I walk toward him, nearly blinded in the wind and spray.

"The currents, you see Jeremy, are very strong here. And the water gets deeper. The shore drops off precipitously just there, do you see? And you're so heavy. If you fell into a trough you would sink straight to the bottom and the water would get inside you and you'd be ruined before you could climb out. Now be careful."

Straightening to look past him where the waves break and spume, I wonder whether "precipitous" and "trough" are in his lexicon. Can he analyze my words correctly over this thunder and splash? The broad-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ranged pink noise here is not quite the type of background his discriminating ears were programmed to filter. Of course he can adjust the programs if he wishes; it is virtually impossible to tell whether he has. I would have to plug him back in, request an abstract of the memory-space in question, run long analyses against the original syntax . . . or just ask him?

No. (I surprise myself here. Why for God's sake be afraid to put a straight question to the intricate thinking system I designed? No need for emotion, really. An interesting problem in cybernetics is all it is.) But what was I thinking of?

Here he is, out of the water, dripping and broadly grinning. His face can be most affecting, whether or not one realizes—as he comes closer—what he is.

"I could feel the cold," he says.

With not quite the proper feeling, I think, and ruminate quickly over what is missing. More of a shiver to make his point. Rapid breathing, intimations of excitement: general systemic response to physical stimulation and exposure. A complex trigger will be needed—thermal, exertion-gauging and judgemental gates. Do teenage boys run out of the water or walk? I will work on this tonight.

Paternal now, I place a hand on his shoulder. It is warm with the dissipation of heat. Too warm, in fact; there is no mechanism to mimic the squeezing off of body-surface capillaries under cold conditions. But no one should notice, I think. I smile at the subtleties of his facial expression in approval.

"Back to the house now," I say.

And he runs ahead, to please me: a proper son. He needs only, like all sons I suppose, a bit of attention and refinement. To be perfect.

These nights late in winter, Cold Harbor seems no longer so cold or so lifeless. Firelight casts its warming yellow glow over stacked boxes, some of them now open to neatly folded clothes, endearingly small-sized. Unfortunately these reflect only my untutored taste and my painfully arrived-at—though certainly often wrong-headed—judgement. As do all things in this house.

At night with cold efficiency Jeremy improves his mind. He harnesses his blindingly fast cognitive processes to refine and streamline his thought-paths. He absorbs, by scanning without a pause my lifelong accumulation of books, a store of knowledge about the world, which he collates in some unfathomable manner. Meanwhile he converses most pleasantly. His style of speech is evocative of Hardy, I think. Or Jane Austen—another stay-at-home of surprising perspicacity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A pity I have no admiration for tea," he remarks, adding, "or ale, for all of that."

"You're too young," I remind him, "to drink."

"But I rather thought I was being clever."

He sounds slightly miffed, which he does so superbly that I am invariably taken in. One can only be thankful he has not affected a British accent. I hasten to reassure him.

"Ah, you were. Passably clever. Don't, however, get ahead of yourself. Boys your age have their own kind of humor—of a rather unsubtle sort."

To which he says, "No shit, Jackson."

My library, you see, is quite eclectic. It is widespread, too, in the sense of being distributed about the house with apparent, though not actual, randomness. Jeremy, unbothered by forgetfulness, has aped my housekeeping habits, and as an agent of entropy works much more rapidly than I.

Now discipline—a category of interaction which his last remark brings to mind—fills me with unease: a persistent canker one fears to touch, however trying Jeremy does undeniably become. One evening last week, for example, he hurled with effortless precision a fine old leatherbound volume onto the crackling embers. Eye-burning black smoke issued forth in great billows, clouding the room with vile fog.

Jeremy clambered up onto unevenly stacked boxes one would not have thought—lacking his analytical abilities—could have supported his weight. He breathed deeply, sucking hot smoke past his sensors. He had never, he explained, though familiar with its composition, and aware that people habitually inhaled it, smelled smoke.

What, then, could I do? I opened the windows east and west, inviting the chill to enter and the no-longer-cozy air of the room to exit—carrying with it, transubstantiated to a less orderly form, Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. An explanation for the choice of fuel was not forthcoming.

Now, had Jeremy—his stated purpose notwithstanding—been curious as to my response to this bit of whimsical outrage, he found it (I blush to confess) characteristic. I spared, once again, the rod; I lectured the youth, not unkindly; I closed the windows.

These mornings, as the pall of winter lifts, I waken readily with the ever-earlier dawn, less prone to hangover than before. My time with Jeremy is spent mostly indoors now. Mist less often shrouds the shore and holds its curtain before the wretched little town. People drawn to the sea venture out along the oilblackened beach, passing by our gray-shingled house on their way to the Point (glancing absently, one hopes, in this direction. With what thoughts?) and then walking on.

In the afternoons I climb the low-ceilinged stair to find Jeremy, in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

capable of boredom, lounging placidly in a boyish pose awaiting further stimuli. He challenges me to word-games, playing on my fondness for bookish anecdotes, taunting my imperfect recall. Or he chides me for inelegant blocks of programming he has discovered and remedied while I slept. But always he exudes good cheer. For he strives earnestly, though unfeelingly, to be a good son. As he is designed—inalterably I hope—to be.

And in the evenings I lie watching the light smear purple and yellow across the smudged windows at the west. I can hear the sea roll and crash at the crumbled shore—whispering, I fancy, hints about the future I can never, quite, hear.

The world, Jeremy remarked one early spring day, quoting one of his Englishmen, is what it is.

An odd sort of warning, perhaps. For though Jeremy is often playful, he is never entirely capricious. He does nothing without a reason. And he has no moods.

I was therefore, upon careful reflection afterwards, not totally surprised by his disappearance from the house, discovered at dawn when I climbed no more eagerly than usual to the once-nursery and found the purple rhinoceros in its place, but not Jeremy.

I will not deny, merely enfeeble by objectifying, my emotions. My palms and forehead became slick with sweat; there was a momentary weakness at my knees. I seated myself and thought with false calm, maybe he is hiding somewhere in the house. I correctly disbelieved this, but did not want to jump, as they say, off the deep end. As yet.

However, the exercise of searching the house was therapeutic. By the time I had convinced myself of Jeremy's utter absence, I was more or less prepared to deal with it. Which is to say, I had decided to postpone dread and anguish until their time should be shown to have arrived. Pending which, I settled myself to pacing and practicing sundry forms of self-deception.

Two-thirty in the afternoon. The day has grown windy and bright, sunlight blazing white out of the blue void and laying on the surface of things so brilliantly—as if rocks and dirt, brittle weedpatches, gnarled bits of flotsam and sagging scrubpines alive after yet another winter effulge with a light of their own. Their organic aura glows triumphantly at the advent of spring.

And at two-thirty, dry in the manner of one who has been recently wet, Jeremy strolls through the door. His demeanor, to choose a human analogue, is nonchalant: fresh of face, hair windblown, clothing moderately asunder. He faces me and says, "I'm so glad the weather's better."

I find his nineteenth-century schoolboy style suspect and disturbing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Jeremy," I say. "You left the house and were gone all morning."

His reaction to which I can begin, but only begin, to surmise, as it flashes through his superconducting, sardine-can-sized mind. He observes that I have stated an obvious fact; he gathers further clues from my rather tense stance and probably tremulous tone of voice; he detects from the distance of a meter and a half the distinctive vapor of whiskey, noticing also the bottle and glass on the table beside the unopened mystery novel. These things he compares to similar patterns observed in his three-month span of cognitive history. He merges this situation into his model of human behavior, refining it accordingly, and calls upon this improved model to choose—according to the heuristics by which, for Jeremy, the game of life is played—his next action. He accomplishes all this with no discernible pause, except for the half-second hesitation—itself a deliberate act—which he uses to signal surprise and thoughtfulness. He allows a gentle frown to cross his pale forehead, and says:

"Were you worried, Father? I'm terribly sorry if I upset you."

His eyes are clear as browntinted glass. The directness of youth shines from his face. His stance is delicately poised, weight concentrated on the forward slender leg while the other trails, bent slightly at the intricately-jointed knee. An arm is half-lifted, showing tan artificial skin below a rolled flannel sleeve still creased from its box. Jeremy holds this pose for about three seconds.

My heart pounds in its cave; a trembling is born between my shoulders and spreads in waves through weak mortal flesh. I am unable to utter the questions I know, for reasons unrelated to my feelings of the moment, must be asked.

Jeremy takes a step, then another more quickly. He covers the sand-strewn linoleum expanse between us in perfectly scaled strides, arriving below my averted head after a timelapse measurable in heartbeats. He hugs me tightly with arms just pliant enough to resemble firm-muscled young limbs. With his head warm from thermal dissipation millimeters below my jaw, he comfortingly says:

"Don't worry, Father, I'm home now. It's all right."

Spring sinks its claws deep into the inhospitable earth of Cold Harbor, pricking green tuberculed life from the salt-leeched soil to rise twisting in the warming wind. Daily the mist lifts higher from the shore, extending the horizon farther past the Point and drawing vaster seaviews through the smeared windows of my home.

Jeremy is now a creation complete unto himself, requiring little from me in the way of software refinement or mechanical ministration. He has learned well enough to care for himself, as he will have eventually to do. And he needs nothing, after all, in the way of affection.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His first venture from home having yielded satisfactory results—soon related to me in bright detail—Jeremy now repeats the journey with daily variations. And I am left with steadily eroding ground from which to halt the advancement of events.

The first morning, says Jeremy, he saw no one. He went to the Point, splashed a bit and mapped the place in his memory. Incidentally he calculated his bodily density by displacement of water to be one point seven times that of human substance: a poor prospect for swimming lessons. His smile flashes with boyish imperishability as he chatters on, relating the adventure with almost human bliss. Undoubtedly it was good exercise for his situational response abilities, this deluge of unstructured stimuli. The sort of thing boys thrive upon.

His next expedition, some days later, to which I tacitly consented by my silent acceptance of the first, brought about a dreaded epochal event: Jeremy's first confrontation with a human being other than his . . . other than myself. The person involved was, Jeremy explains, a fisherman's son. This lad is about Jeremy's age—which, do you know, I have never precisely pinned down, not having had a real physical son who might be a yardstick for such things. But I think fifteen or so.

The fisherman's son: a coarse lad, vaguely identifiable among the lineup of literary antecedents in the cool blue brain, heretofore its only occupants besides myself. A Donleavy stableboy, Jeremy suggests. This youngster encountered Jeremy midway along the sinuous path through scrub-covered dunes near the Point. He challenged the false boy in a generally rough but not unfriendly manner as to his origins and status—whether townie or tourist—with particular questions about his present activity. To which Jeremy replied: Thurmondston, Ireland; staying indefinitely with his father, a professor on sabbatical; and exploring the beach. (Ingenious replies, I am moved to admit; the first by way of accounting for any odd habits of speech, and the second for appending an open-ended ellipsis to the nature of our lives—of my life—at Cold Harbor.)

The afternoon these boys spent together, the living and the mechanical, proceeded with roving in adolescent feckleśsness about the narrow ocean-bracketed isthmus of the Point, exchanging boasts. I cannot but imagine Jeremy creating a fantastic Irish landscape for his gullible listener, milking effortlessly the penurious, brain-wrenching effort of a dozen authors for an hour's idle chat.

On subsequent days, drawn ever closer together, Jeremy and the local lad—whose name I understand to be Paul—make a routine of the day's events. Jeremy goes out into the wide, many-peopled world, exercising his ability to function unrecognized within it. I should possibly welcome this as the firmest proof of my achievement. At least I should accept it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as deserved tribute to my unthanked and long-unseen collaborator —Jeremy's mother, if you will. Though somehow I feel only numbness and loss.

My hours now burgeon with inactivity. I have time to stroll the oil-stained beach and take what pleasure there is in the annual remission of Cold Harbor's malignant climate. Time to locate and reread treasured volumes scattered through this large, unkempt and silent house. I have pursued none of this with any seriousness. Instead I walk miles over the rotted linoleum of these obstacled rooms, lift salt-smudged windows where the sun makes dirty rainbows, and gaze across the unbounded expanse of the spring-green sea. I think at these times of nothing especially—or of everything, from a distance. I watch the fishing boats bob. I consider the course my existence might have taken had I turned like those boats into the waves, not just drifted before the wind and the tide.

The sluggish warmth of Cold Harbor has stirred to life a veritable garden of remembrance and regret. I think of colleagues distant, unheard-from or dead; I recall friendships to which my own contribution never seems to have done justice. Fattened and happy, the memories chatter among themselves nearly out of earshot.

"You terrified philosopher," a woman's voice says.

I deny this.

"Oh, yes," she says. "You write your papers and make your proposals. But you're afraid to test your ideas in the real world. I think you're scared to death an artificial personality may be too much like the real thing."

Nonsense. I would be happy, of course, to test my theories. But the hardware isn't ready. My systems cannot work in thin air. (A faint note of accusation here. A leveling of the meaningful glance.)

"You just wait. I'll give you your goddamned hardware someday. And you'll be so scared—you'll run and bury your goddamned systems in the sand."

Clinging to the teeth of Cold Harbor, the oilstained sand is the color of ashes. Fishing boats put to sea, plumbing the black depths for scaly bodies to drag back in iceholds. If she were here today, I think, would she feel chastened or triumphant? If she were here . . .

I seem to hear laughter. Do my memories mock me? I look up in something like alarm.

No. It is the hungry squawk of gulls, swooping after their midday meals. And the air has grown warmer.

Jeremy, of course, will not hear of staying inside on a nice day. Nor does he care to join me for a stroll in the sunlight. It is as if the season has infected him with wanderlust, as it would a real boy. But real boys

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are built of organic compounds that seethe in the earth, while Jeremy's heart is a coolant pump made of unnatural alloys, and his brain is chilled to a superconducting cold that is alien to sunny worlds where life thrives.

None of which mitigates my aloneness this warm June morning. Swatting at mosquitoes emboldened by the unaccustomed dearth of seabreeze, I go from room to room gathering whiskey-stained coffee cups.

The dishwater turns gray as it sluices through my fingers. I pause to wonder: is Jeremy equipped, physically, to deal with the demands made upon him by his friendship with this yet unseen Paul? The surreptitious beer, for example, slipped from the fisherman's refrigerator, tossed back casually to be stored in Jeremy's modest holding cavity for eventual evacuation—this should present no problem. And the danger of a summer swim? Jeremy must have manufactured by now an excuse to cover this. But might there be other, unforeseen challenges to Jeremy's physical equipage, secret pastimes in which teenage boys customarily indulge? I find few clues in the memory of my own cloistered adolescence.

Holding a half-rinsed saucer, I am given over to restlessness and anxiety: the agonies, I reflect without irony, of parenthood. And all for the sake of—let us be blunt—a machine.

Drying my hands on my trouserlegs, I abandon the dishes and pace the house, unable to bear this cluttered, sandstrewn prison a moment longer. Without a thought for my overworn shoes, my unshaved face and matted hair, I am outside in the glare of sunlight crunching up the graveled road. Though aimless in intent, I am moving toward the Point, that scrawny fist of rock that thrusts its lighthouse at the sullen sea.

The road deteriorates. Shortly it is no more than a tire-rutted path, wending through low dunes of dirty sand, bushes with pointed leaves wagging in the breeze, and dark outcroppings of rock. This is my first walk here since I have lived at Cold Harbor.

The sense of isolation is acute, much more so here than where my gray-shingled house makes its stand on the sheltered bight. The lighthouse looms huge over the mouth of the harbor. And near it, extending a rickety pier bravely into the surf, a poor weatherbeaten shambles of a house perches at the very edge of the sea. It is uninhabited, one must think—uninhabitable, even—but there are deep tiretracks near it in the spray-dampened sand. As I draw near, a tattered curtain flutters quickly. Or perhaps not.

Rounding the place slowly, improving my angle of surveillance, I see a fishing boat made fast to the pier, where it rises and groans against the piles. It is an ancient side trawler: western-rigged, pilot house forward and sagging cargo boom aft, rusted from gunwale to waterline. It strains at its moorings, threatening to yank out cleats, pier, or house, whichever is less solidly planted. (I incline to think house.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A curtain flutters again; my imagination seizes some barely-glimpsed detail to sketch, in retrospect, the image of a slender figure vanishing behind the sunbleached fabric. A trick of the shadows, no doubt. From somewhere comes a ratchety noise, growing rapidly louder.

A vehicle is grinding up the twisted pathway from Cold Harbor. I tell myself there is no reason to be ill at ease: it is a public place, after all. Nonetheless I stand absurdly square-shouldered to face the metallic glint.

A decrepit Land Rover, rusty as the fishingboat and of similar vintage, growls and slides across the uneven surface, lurching to a stop before me. From it clambers a slack-jowled man of middle years. He slams the door, adjusts the hang of his faded shirt where it balloons at the belly. I register dimly the man's grizzled aspect, the air of unwash about him, the eyes aglow with drink. He brings himself to a halt, belligerent of pose, two meters away.

"You're the guy lives in the old Kilby place," he alleges.

By my silence, I concur in the man's remark; at least I offer no quibble.

"Well keep," he spits out, "that son of yours. Or whatever he is. Away from my daughter."

Completely astonished by this, I am unable sensibly to reply. Thus my bellicose accoster is able to develop his theme.

"Understand you're some kind of professor," he snorts. "Well you listen, Doc. That kid of yours with that weird way of talking he's got. Been sneaking around here while I'm gone. Gotta make a living and there aren't enough fish out there to fry for dinner. Doing God knows what with my young daughter. Only fifteen, hasn't got any idea what that kind of boy's gonna be after. So you keep him away, you hear me, Doc?"

As he speaks, I am struck by the sheer fleshiness of the man: great pouches of skin hanging from his face; oilblack hair; brown patches like spilled paint up his exposed hairy arms; wrinkles and ravines in odd places. And it strikes me that this is humanity—its decaying flesh impatient for the annoyance of life to flee from its confines.

"You hear me, Doc?" he repeats, pointing at my own aging face.

I nod dumbly, imperfectly concentrating on the main level of discourse here, and essentially unbelieving. For surely Jeremy, though endlessly curious, and from all physical appearance complete in every detail, could have no desire to live up to this man's vile suspicions. So I say confidently:

"There must be some mistake."

"I'll tell you a mistake," he says quickly. "A big mistake would be for that boy of yours to let me catch him around here again. That'll be a sorry tale for sure, Doc. You mark my words."

Giving final punctuation to his narrative by way of a globulous mass of spittle dispatched to the ashen sand, this obstreperous fellow turns on a well-worn heel and pounds into the house, which trembles around him

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as he slams its door. From within, a shout finds its way through many cracks and reaches me across the rocks and sand. Arriving softly, a name:

"Paula."

Which strikes my ears in a gently jarring discord, vague at first but becoming more precise and elemental under sharpened attention—a Webern quartet encased in a single word. Variations spin themselves with mathematic inevitability. First the name: too facile a distortion of Paul the fisherman's son to be shrugged away as coincidence. Next the thought of Jeremy lying. And the question of motive.

. . . But I suppose this series of thoughts must be achingly obvious.

As my feet ply the crunching path homeward, the choicest replies and verbal parries to the rude words of the fisherman form in my mind. If there are intimations of lust here, I might have said, you need not look beyond your doorstep for their origin. Because Jeremy's sole motivation, in this congress as in all others, is curiosity of the purest sort. And he is, moreover, incapable of bringing about any troublesome change in your fair daughter's condition, particularly in the way of parturition. Assuming by the way that your daughter is fair. In defiance of all genetic likelihood. And so forth.

Until, by the time I arrive home, I am of mixed mood. On the one hand, I am troubled that Jeremy has conjured, in the impenetrable iciness of his brain, tales of adventures with Paul the fisherman's son in the stead of whatever true stories there may be of Paula the fisherman's daughter. On the other hand, I remember Jeremy's inalterable urge to learn, to expand his model of human nature and thereby render himself more fully human. What could be more natural—more delightfully apt, in fact—than bringing his curiosity to bear on a human his own age but of opposite gender? Besides, the inversion of sex in his tale-telling may be mere reticence, wariness of my possible response—natural enough when one considers the shelfful of pre-Victorian novels the lad has consumed.

In the end, I am left marveling, with a touch of pride, at this ingenious, adaptive, energetic, and (it now seems) sexually convincing system of intelligence, whose exploits have so thoroughly upset the fisherman.

Yet in some measure I share that poor father's unhappiness. For love them though we might, we can never, either of us, control the minds of our children.

I sit facing south, toward the lighthouse, as the sun buries itself at my shoulder. Jeremy mocks attentiveness at my side, sifting the raw experience of another summer day. His mind's relentless search for patterns admits no moment of stillness or repose.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Father," he says at length. The distinctive slur of this benighted coast is on his tongue.

I acknowledge him in brief syllables. Unable to decide what, if anything, to say about Paul or Paula, I have no interest in idle chat.

"Why are you so distant tonight?" he says, solicitous now. "You haven't asked me what I did today."

I allow myself a glance: quite the proper teenager in his cutoffs and teeshirt, displaying for admiration his perfectly formed limbs—sufficient, I think, to arouse the interest of any fisherman's daughter.

"I am just," I tell him, "waiting for the lighthouse."

"Well I was wondering," he says, "if it would be all right if I spent the night with Paul tomorrow. On the dunes near the Point. He's got a tent."

Following this (modestly apocalyptic) inquiry, he pauses in a simulation of expectancy. The tiny motors that drive his facial features move them into a configuration that suggests nervousness and doubt, while in reality he has assumed an emotionally uncolored wait-state. I temporize:

"Tomorrow night?"

"Yes, tomorrow. It's quite a common thing, you know, camping out. I think it will be a good experience."

I ponder this with a curious sense of absence—knowing, however, that Jeremy's request is a pivotal event, that some great subterfuge is being enacted, if only I could see it. But I stare toward the lighthouse; stars have begun to appear. Jeremy says:

"There's so much I could learn by spending a whole night out."

Which sounds true enough. Tiny lights blink at sea, on and off, like the billions of binary switches in Jeremy's cranium.

"Would it be all right?" he quietly persists.

And then—just as I think I am ready to thrust my questions through the subtle barrier between us—the piercing eye of the lighthouse casts its awful gaze over the water, putting its own nightly question to the dark encroaching sea. Which must have the answer, but remains silent.

And I say, "Yes."

Dreaming. The night hangs like a shroud through which I grope toward deeper dark.

I awaken to fists beating the door. A whiskey glass clatters as I rise in disorientation, like a mariner befogged. Past midnight, says the blue face of the clock. The pounding below continues.

Down the creaking stair, tripping on the turned-up edge of linoleum, I wrap a damp palm around the doorknob. Swollen in the heavy air, the door resists my tug. Outside, a bellowing commences.

"Open that door, goddamn you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Not meaning to oblige, but out of preset purpose, I give the door a successful yank, admitting starlit night.

"Come with me, you bastard," roars the bullish man from the Point, half-visible at the stoop, "if you don't want me to kill that boy of yours."

Dumbly I am outside the door staring beyond him at the all-devouring night.

"He's out with my daughter in a boat, that little punk. I'll have him locked up and he's lucky I don't shoot him."

We climb into the Land Rover, which smells of seawater, oil, and rot. Its engine growls as if to cow the pitted road into obeisance. Dimly the meaning of the man's words assembles itself before me, like graphics on a video screen.

Got a call from a friend in town, he tells me. Saw his girl getting into a boat with that boy from England or wherever. Heading south out of the harbor. Thought he'd want to know.

You bet he wanted to know. Snarling, he wrenches the gearshift knob, stomps the brake, buries the wheels in clotted sand. We have arrived at the Point. He leaves me to follow like a somnambulist and walks down to the pier, where his fishing boat creaks at its mooring lines, hulking black and hideous in the night. There he throws lines off the pier and leaps aboard. The boat sways heavily and begins to drift before the current.

"Come on, goddamn you. If you want to save the skin of that boy of yours."

Even before I climb aboard I have a sense of movement beneath me, as if the entire illusion of the Point, the wretched house, the oilslick pier is coming adrift, losing its grounding in any recognizable reality.

But a jolt of reality strikes me as I leap to the pitching, slippery deck: the stench of rotting fish rising from the hold. I clutch at the rail, gasping for breathable air; finding none, I lean over and retch into the darkness.

From the submerged bowels of the fishing boat comes the guttural eructation of an old engine laboring to life. I hang onto the slimy rail, watching black water roiling below, as the aged craft surges away into the night.

Looking up I see the white mastlight high above the pilothouse, and more dimly, beneath it, the portside running light: as dull and red as the glow behind my eyes. Step by step I approach it, clutching the rail, until I reach the wave-breaking prow. Here I find a ladder and, with white fingers slipping on the rusted bars, I lift my body from the deck.

The heat inside the pilothouse is oppressive. Smells of metal, sweat, and rum are forced into my nostrils. I sense at first—then faintly see—the dark form beside me, clutching a small wooden wheel and staring ahead.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His eyes glow with the green light of the radar, the only instrument on the bridge that gives a hint of life. The man snarls:

"They'll be around the Point there."

He points at the radar. Cold Harbor stretches in profile across the screen, less jagged in the eye of the cheap radar than in physical reality. A burly finger pokes at emptiness, smudging the glass with sweat.

"The shoals there. That's where they all go. They'll be anchored there having their little party."

His breath is a dizzying fume; I yearn to back away from him, from the very salaciousness of his voice. His hand finds a lever in the dark with a familiar, intimate touch. The old trawler moans and beats more fervently at the water.

Are there other vessels with us, abroad on the nightblack sea? I stare at the finger-smudge he calls the shoals, but see nothing. Maybe, then, there is nothing to see; we are headed nowhere; this dreamlike voyage will be abandoned. But:

"There," says the brute. His dirty finger touches the glass, and this time I perceive a tiny blot.

"Out by the shoals," he says, almost chanting. "That's where they all go."

He lifts to his lips a bottle that catches fleetingly the illumination of the screen.

I feel my nausea swelling again and grope my way to the door. The damp air that swirls around my face is neither warm nor cool; it has a stink of its own, but a milder one than the pilothouse. Gratefully I suck it down, staring at the beaten wood of the deck on which the running light casts its blood-red pallor.

I think: however enraged this beastly fisherman may be, I must calm him. When the moment arrives, I must allay his groundless fears for his daughter. Possibly I can enlist her help in this. For by now—if truly she and Jeremy are out here in the night—she must have discovered that her father's lust-ridden imagination has been aroused for naught. If absolutely necessary, I can open Jeremy's skull and lay bare the cool blue brain.

The throbbing of the engine drops to a susurrating murmur, barely audible above the slosh of waves.

"There they are," breathes the fisherman. Then, with a brush of his hand, he darkens the running lights. The old trawler, pitching madly in the swells, seems to disappear around me.

We are still moving forward, drifting as if by force of brutish will toward what this man must know is there. I wonder for a moment at his perception of things I cannot see. Perhaps, I think, I am too much like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jeremy: lacking that strange awareness that lies outside reason. Perhaps I am not quite as human as this foul-smelling man at the helm.

Then the sound of laughter reaches my ears, and humanity rushes into my throat. The fisherman grabs my arm, squeezing off my stillborn shout.

"Now we'll see about that boy of yours."

The laughter is louder now, distinctly female in timbre. It is terribly close, yet somehow distant, drifting across the water from some reachless remove.

I think I see a shape ahead in the night. A shadow, merely, it rises and falls as though suffering no connection with the water. Abruptly a small motorboat takes shape: twenty meters away, no more. All is dark on its deck and in its covered cabin. A thick arm moves at my side; the engine gives a dying cough and falls silent. Moving past me with unsuspected stealth, the fisherman lowers a mangled rope fender from the bow. And we drift ever closer.

Louder laughter: a boy's voice now mingles with the girl's, innocent and unsuspecting. My own voice remains imprisoned in my throat.

Then a weight detaches itself from the trawler and lands with a thump on the motorboat. The fisherman, righting himself on the small deck, bellows something obscene. There follows a girl's short cry, and sounds of scrambling. I stand fixed with horror—afraid to intervene, maybe, or simply no match for the speed of events.

"Come out of there, you little bastard."

The girl cries out again, in fright or maybe defiance. There is a movement in the motorboat's cabin door. A heartbreakingly familiar form appears.

Jeremy! (I don't know if I shout or merely think of shouting.)

"No!" implores the girl, her pale form appearing behind him. "Stop it! He's crazy, he'll hurt you."

Shadows commingle on the fantail of the motorboat. The fisherman roars; the girl protests; still there is only silence from Jeremy, who stands (I note in alarm) quite naked. The girl likewise.

There is no time to wonder at this. Rapid movement quakes the little boat. I hear a confusion of voices, among which I catch distinctly in the girl's shrill voice:

"And he's not even a real boy, you big fat stupid fool!"

To which the father replies, he will see about that..

There is a flash of red, brighter than the running light and then gone. A slam like thunder dissipates over the waves.

"Jeremy!" two voices cry.

The boylike body lies on its side—not really in agony, I know, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

agonizing beyond belief to witness. Still he is moving, trying perhaps to sit up, twisting sideways on the deck.

The fisherman is motionless—immobilized, perhaps, by the shock of his own violence. Wailing words of hatred, his daughter springs forward in a blur of ghostly flesh. She wrests the weapon from his hand and moves back across the deck, to the place where Jeremy lies broken.

The fisherman rouses himself; he steps forward as though to strike her. But his body, less dense than that of the unhuman youth, is brought to a halt by the first blast of the handgun and hurled against the transom by the second. After a long heartbeat he emits a lowing moan, clutching his middle.

Jeremy has half-risen; the slender girl leans over him. Soothing words come from his mouth, but they are intended for the girl alone, and are unintelligible from where I cling in dread. The girl helps Jeremy up on his undamaged leg; the other trails at an unnatural angle. She leads him to the rail by the fishing boat.

Jeremy looks up at me, an outstretched arm-length away, through bright brown eyes unclouded by pain or remorse. He extends an arm.

"Father."

The almost-breaking voice is perfect.

"Help me up."

Paula does not glance across the deck where her father tries to stem the seeping darkness. She watches only Jeremy—knowing what he is, as I do, yet loving him with bright girlish clarity. She seems unmindful of her nakedness.

Jeremy now is balanced on the low gunwale of the motorboat. His arms reach out to me, and I grasp them unthinkingly, I feel their melting, mechanical warmth, their firm grasp so much like real young muscles. His face (whose upturned nose and pale freckles I imagine in the darkness) watches mine as he stands bracketed by two pairs of arms.

At that moment of mutual helplessness I look at the girl. Paula. And for a single instant she meets my gaze. I see in her eyes, set in a scrawny face above high cheekbones, something of the same ache and bewilderment that throb inside me: the fruit of absurd and boundless love, of which only humans are capable.

I feel then, growing in the space between us, a kind of union I have never experienced—a relationship, however ephemeral, of perfect communication. It is the thing I have strived after, failed at, and fled from, without ever knowing its true nature, and hoped to achieve with the cybernetic boy, my Christmas-born son.

Yes: and the very thing which Jeremy, programmed in my likeness, has sought to achieve with this poor girl, whose beautiful haunted eyes are locked with mine in the fullness of the night.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I long powerfully to embrace her, to take her into my arms and give her the thought-dampening comfort she seeks.

And perhaps, as I feel this gush of tenderness, and alliance, toward this unclothed dolorous girl, I may actually make some small move which loosens my hold on Jeremy. But only for a moment. For I have no thought—here in the darkness, crowded with mortality and dread—that the trawler might take a sudden roll away from the motorboat, opening a space of half a gaping meter between them. Which will close again, only after:

Jeremy, unimpeded on either side—abandoned for that fleeting instant by the two of us who love him—quickly (owing to his weight) and quietly (owing to his lack of emotion) tumbles:

Into the allmothering sea.

September will return to the gray-shingled house at Cold Harbor. The wind will crawl coldly between the teeth of the jetties, insinuating itself beneath doors and behind drawn curtains. Linoleum, blotched with age and oil, will curl across floorboards hard as stone from accreted seeping salt. Up the stair, dim and head-bumpingly low, the dying fire will raise a draft, whispering past icy bedrooms, stirring dust to life under old furniture, and floating at last through the dirty pink once-nursery in the attic, with its purple rhinoceros on the wall and narrow salt-smudged windows.

Here the rental agent will pause wheezing on the morning of my departure, remove from his coat a yellowed handkerchief and, unapologizing, hack into it.

"Hard to fill them this time of year," he will inform me.

I will merely tell him where to reach me: this number, this sun-warm street. The card I give him will bear her handwriting, which was always distinctive.

"Got some boys coming," he will say, pocketing the card with the handkerchief, "to get your luggage. Guess you want it out today."

No: only the coffin-shaped carton. The rest—the books, the machines, the memories—can wait out the winter.

The man may pause a moment before leaving, allow his small eyes to linger over my visage, for during the sultry season just past I became briefly, locally famous. A tabloid Frankenstein. Robot Seduces Girl, 15, Shoots Drunken Dad. Inventor to Salvage Silicon Casanova.

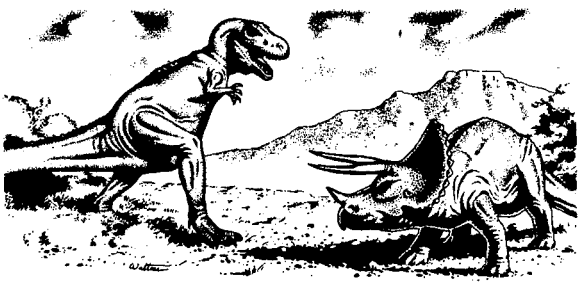
None of which, probably, will matter to the rental agent, whose cheeks are gray and gestures desperate after fifty winters of fleeing the decay that creeps like a greedy fiend up the oil-blackened beach at Cold Harbor. He will want only to return to his weatherstripped house, his flask, his lap-blanket. To his life so little different than mine has been.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But no longer. For this will be the morning of my departure.

It will take months, of course, to bring Jeremy back to life—no: back to operation—again. His body may, for all I know, be unrepairable. I did not give him that; only the mind that lies sealed in its blue sardine-can-sized box. And finally, I suppose, that is all I did. Gave it to him. Gave him the opportunity to use it. What use he made of it . . . Well, what use do any of us make of such ambivalent bequests as knowledge and desire?

Nonetheless I will try to have him back again. Only, I will not raise him from his moldering grave alone. I have learned (and not too late, I hope) the true nature of the gift I received when I opened my coffin-shaped Christmas present. And for my own sake, and poor Paula's, and especially for the sake of my unthanked and long-unseen friend, I will turn my back on this windshriven shore and hide no longer among these lifeless pages from Cold Harbor. ●



MARTIN GARDNER (from page 25)

SOLUTION TO ANIMAL TTT

To win Tippy TTT first take the center cell. Thereafter always play directly opposite your opponent's last move. You won't win until you take the last cell, but that move will always form Tippy.

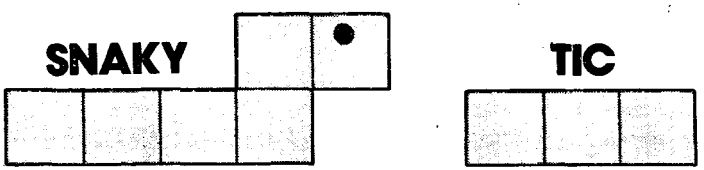
How about the other four-cell animals? The smallest boards on which Elly, Knobby, and Skinny win are orders 4, 5, and 6 respectively. Fatty, surprisingly, is a tie on all boards, including an infinite field! The proof of this is very pretty, and will be given in the first chapter of a fascinating book Harary is writing on what he calls achievement and avoidance games.

Notice that in all the games so far mentioned, the first player never loses. There is an amusing proof that in games of this type the second player can never win. Assume there is a second-player winning strategy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The first player can make an irrelevant first move, then pretend he is the second player and steal the second player's strategy! His irrelevant first move cannot be a liability. If the strategy requires that he play on *that* cell, he simply makes another irrelevant move. We have now bumped into a contradiction. If the second player has a winning strategy, the first player can steal it and win! Of course the proof tells you nothing about *how* the first player can force a win or draw.

FIGURE 2



There are many unsolved problems involving animal TTT. Consider Snaky, the six-cell animal shown in Figure 2. Is she a winner for the first player, and if so, what is the smallest board on which she wins? Harary offers a $50 reward for the first proof, before 1990, that there is a board on which Snaky wins, and $100 for the first proof that she is never a winner. Maybe some reader of this feature can grab the prize before Harary's book is published.

Each of the above games has a variant in which both players make the *same* mark, say *X*s, and the first to create the specified animal wins. Harary calls them one-color games. Ties obviously are not possible if the board is large enough to contain the animal. You might think that one-color TTT games are trivial. Far from it!

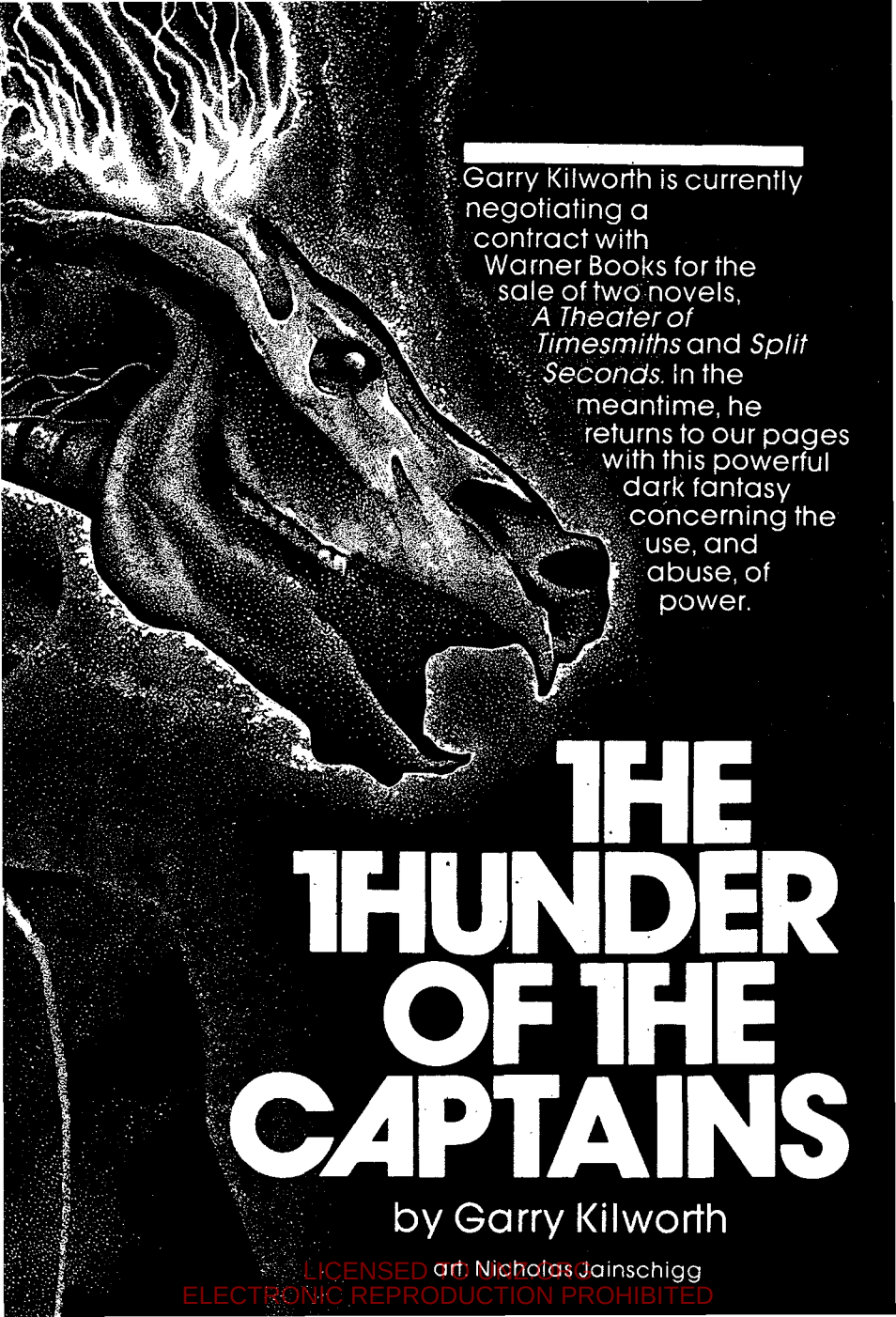
Consider Tic, the simple animal made of three cells in a straight line. It is easy to see that the first player wins if one-color Tic TTT is played on the order-3 board. The order-4 board is not easy to analyze and the outcome on an order-5 board is still unknown!

Each of the four-cell animals will tile a square except for Tippy, who cannot tile any rectangle. Elly will tile a square if and only if its side is a multiple of four, and a rectangle if and only if the product of its sides is a multiple of eight. As a pleasant task, which will not be answered because you will soon solve it, cut out six replicas of Elly and see how quickly you can form them into a 2 x 8 rectangle.

Together the five four-cell creatures have a total of 20 cells. Will the set tile a 4 x 5 rectangle? The answer is no, but can you prove it? The answer on page 147 will introduce you to a powerful method of proof based on a coloring technique.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Garry Kilworth is currently negotiating a contract with Warner Books for the sale of two novels, *A Theater of Timesmiths* and *Split Seconds*. In the meantime, he returns to our pages with this powerful dark fantasy concerning the use, and abuse, of power.

THE THUNDER OF THE CAPTAINS

by Garry Kilworth

art: Nicholas Jainschigg

LICENSED TO GALE GROUP
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Those who have never experienced the rigid discipline of a military school cannot imagine how assiduously such establishments work to destroy one's identity. There is not a single minute of the seventeen-hour day that is not filled with gruelling physical training, base manual labor or academic study. One might work through the remaining hours of the night in order to be immaculate for a morning parade and an inspection, then, desperate for sleep, stand by with a tense frame while someone in authority destroys the kit layout because a toothbrush is still damp, or is facing the wrong way, and orders a re-inspection within the hour. Even during sleep one's head still rings with the bawling voices and bugle calls that pass for communication. There are nightmares that are formed from a state of extreme order as well as chaos.

There are more terrors than are found in the established hierarchy. Just as terrible as the hostile oppressions of the authorities are the attentions of the senior boys whose brutality belongs to street gangs. They choose a victim with care and, physically and mentally, annihilate their character with a systematic cruelty found only in a mind disciplined beyond thinking or feeling. I have seen boys beaten, then hung by their legs from third story windows by drum cords. I have seen boys stripped and rubbed raw with wet wire pads. When the lights go out in the dormitories, the manufactured adolescent—a creature processed and fashioned by inflexible ritual, by set rules and regulations—exercises an ungovernable free will and prowls through sleeping forms, looking for the youth who is solitary, friendless and weak. It is a calculated destruction that has all the hallmarks of insanity. There are those who try to fight both formal and informal authority openly, and are broken, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, into items useless to any society except that of a service life. There are those who bend with the system, like malleable strips of copper, hoping that though they allow themselves to be distorted during their years at the school, they can reshape, reform themselves later. There are those who feign mental illness or deliberately cause themselves to be physically disabled, in order to escape. There are those whom the life suits and who have no desire to retain any individuality. Then there are those like Jake and I, who fight in secret, fight insidiously in the dark, with mysticism, black magic, and souls the color of pitchblende.

There were two activities which kept us sane, Jake and I, during those hellish years at the school: horses and witchcraft. Possibly a strange combination, but while we were out horseriding we had the freedom of the open air, the exhilaration of animal-powered speed and a proximity with the natural, chaotic elements of weather and nature to contrast to the order and discipline. At night, behind the closed doors of the drying-room, we lit tinlids of rags soaked in brass cleaner and chanted incan-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tations to unhallowed gods: to Satan, to Nahemah the princess of succubi, to Seddim, to Astaroth, to Bael, to Praslus, to Furfur the demon winged stag, to Glasyalobalus, to Kobal, to Ukoback the stoker of Hell's fires—but most of all, to Cimeries, the demon who rides a black horse. We studied the works of Alister Crowley, Mathers, W. B. Yeats and others of the Order of Golden Dawn.

After our initial explorations into the art of the occult, Jake and I finally formed our own bastard religion, linking our two favorite activities. We began to pray to the spirits of dead horses. Bucephalus, Alexander's charger, and King Richard's mount, Barbary. Other famous steeds. Almost from the dawn of its creation, the destiny of humanity has been closely interwoven with the horse. Together we have forged civilizations out of wildernesses, have pushed back frontiers, have ploughed the land and made it fertile, have conquered wastelands and formed unions stronger than marriages.

In the dim light and foul gases of our homemade brands, we would try to conjure up visions of these beasts in the unsanctified air of the drying-room, murmuring invented chants into its dark corners. Perhaps it was a trick of the mind, brought about by the atmosphere we created, but on certain occasions my heartbeat quickened to see horse-like shapes in the wispy fumes of burning rags. We found the passage in Job, Chapter 39, which says, "Hast thou given the horse strength? Hast though clothed his neck with thunder? He mocketh at fear. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the Captains, and the shouting."

How we loved those words, would recite them backwards in an attempt to produce this wonderful creature, Jake more enthusiastically than I, for he was the leader and I his lieutenant. No one could touch our souls, we were sure of that, for we had blackened them beyond any stains the school could overprint. We heard the thunder of the Captains, but not from afar. We heard them as their vicious faces pressed to ours. We smelt their breath as their mouths contorted with threats and obscenities. We, with stiff bodies, wooden expressions, heard their booming break close to our ears and had held down our heartbeats for fear of betraying fear. We were afraid of being afraid. We ran ten miles in mud and rain; scrubbed toilet pans with nail brushes, scraped, cleaned, polished, washed, ironed, oiled; we slaughtered cardboard enemies; we marched and drilled to distorted commands; we prayed in rigid rows, the words mechanical; we sat with poker spines in disinfected classrooms; we ate our meals in unison; we knew sudden light or instant darkness to the minute—all to the thunder of the Captains.

Of course, we did as we were told, avoided the bullies as best we could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and outwardly appeared pliable to the system's manipulations. But beneath our disciplined shells, deep beneath the fear, were dark smiles that mocked the authorities as surely as Job's horse mocked at fear. We said our "Yes, sirs" and "No, sirs" with the correctness of groomed students, and once on our own prayed to Pegasus, the flying horse that rose from the drops of blood of the decapitated Gorgon. We prayed for deliverance from those who would destroy us. We prayed for the destruction of our enemies. We prayed for power over the lives of the oppressors, the persecutors, the hated authorities.

Somehow I made it through two years at military school and then escaped on the death of my father. My mother required my support at home and money was short. I had to go to work to help with the household expenses. Father had left many debts, God bless him. Jake stayed on, of course, and the last I saw of him at the school was his wan face beneath the cropped tar-black hair, watching me through the barred gates as I walked away. He looked thin and wasted, his prominent front teeth giving him the curious paradoxical appearance of combined predacity and piteousness. For Jake, there was no escape. His father was wealthy and determined to have a soldier for a son. I was sorry for him but that sorrow extended only as far as common human kindness. We had never been friends in the true sense of the word. We had combined our forces to fight a common enemy: had shared experiences as soldiers do in the trenches, only seeing a single facet of a many faceted character. I did not *know* Jake, the way one knows a friend, because life at the school produced narrow viewpoints on personalities. It is like looking at a folded map. One sees small sections of rivers and roads, but their sources and destinations are hidden somewhere behind the sharp creases and edges of the folds. Jake, the whole Jake, was a folded chart and it was only years later that I was to be allowed another study of the regions and contours of the man.

Over the subsequent years my memories of school and its horrors were obliterated from my mind piece by piece. People speak of memories as fading, like sepia photographs under a desert sun, but memories do not fade—they are either there, or they are not. In order to retain memories one has to recharge them from time to time by re-running them through conscious thought. In this way we remember the good old days and not the bad ones, because we muse on pleasant hours and reject uncomfortable ones. Of course, had I wanted to, I could have recalled them—but the desire was not there. Even Jake, with his pinched, eager expression and quick gestures was sliced from my mind, like celluloid film in a cutting room. So too were my tentative ventures into the world of the occult. Consequently, when he came back into my life again, it was a while before I recognized him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By the time I was thirty I had worked at a number of jobs and finally settled into a niche that I hoped would remain available to me for the rest of my life. I became a gamekeeper to John Sutton, a gentleman farmer in the district of Rochford in Essex. The date I took upemployment with him was August the 17th, 1952, five months before the great flood, when high winds and a spring tide encouraged the sea to new, temporary conquests of the east coast of Britain. My period at military school had revealed an aptitude for marksmanship—not something I was especially proud of because of its limited worth in civilian life, but it seemed to impress my employer. The morals of breeding birds to shoot them did not impinge upon my principles either. Most people ate meat and it seemed to me that the only difference between putting a bolt into the brain of a calf, or shot into a bird, was that the latter had some chance of escape, especially from the myopic, cack-handed gentry that sported shotguns on John Sutton's estate every year. In the main they were flaccid, gin-soaked bankers and politicians who had never grown out of playing with guns.

I was needed, among other things, to keep out poachers. East Essex is a settling place for gypsies and John Sutton was convinced that the bulk of local gypsy mealtables was gathered from his land. It was not true, of course. Gypsies are shrewd business people, and if you are looking for a bargain, you stay clear of them, but they have no more thieves amongst them than house dwellers. A pheasant in the bush by the road is considered wild fruit to gypsies and country folk alike, but concentrated poaching is usually carried out by organized gangs from the towns. It was the gypsies that drew Jake back into my life again. They are, traditionally, horse traders and it was on a Thursday in October, market day in Rochford Square, that I felt a lean hand on my shoulder.

"It *is* you!"

I had turned to face a gaunt man of my own age and attempted to place him in front of one of the bars of the Plough and Sail, my local pub.

"Jake! Jake Dorstern," he cried.

Still nothing registered and I felt a little stupid.

"Are you sure . . ." I began, but he interrupted me, saying, "God, fancy seeing you after all these years. How many? Fifteen . . . it must be fifteen. You lucky bastard—you escaped early, didn't you? I had two more years of that . . . well, no sense in raking the ashes, now they're thankfully dead. How are you anyway?"

Then I had him of course. *Jake.* I shook his hand and asked the inevitable questions.

"I'm buying a horse for my girlfriend. We're in London now that the old man's gone. Yes, died a year ago. Left me quite a bit, which is lucky. I'm not good for much. Went into the army, of course. Had to. Wouldn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have inherited otherwise and it's the only thing I've ever been any good at, inheriting money. Not easy, you know. You have to graft like hell at it. People seem to think an inheritance drops in one's lap. Instead one has to slog one's guts out doing all sorts of unpleasant things, like soldiering, in order to keep the source sweet. Captain Dorstern." He smiled grimly. "I nearly became one of them—one of those who tormented us at school . . . and beyond."

"With us . . . well, it was just a general title, for all superior ranks," I said.

"Yes, but they almost got me then, with those three pips. I nearly became one of them—it seemed easier to bend than buck . . ."

"It was always *easier* to bend," I interrupted. "We had to fight to keep our souls—I remember that."

His eyes brightened. "And we did, didn't we? We never—I never let them get *my* soul. You didn't have to contend with their bribes. When the thunder has run its course, the persuasion starts, and it's harder to resist, believe me. Their *acceptance* of you—their admittance to their damned—I kept on fighting though, as I always had—as we did." He paused.

"Still, got it now." He patted a pocket which no doubt contained the check book. All the while he spoke to me his eyes were roaming over faces in the bustling crowd of farmers, horse dealers, and market types. I wondered then how I could have failed to recognize him. That ambivalent look of the snake in a suspended moment—the second in which it is between the decision to strike or slither away out of danger—was in Jake's expression. That same mixture I had witnessed before, only this time it was fear and excitement, one pressing him forward, the other urging him away. And so he was captured in a perfect balance between the two, seeming to be caught, not in physical motion, but in spiritual argument, between two strong desires.

"Can you help me?" he said. "Which of those people are Romanies?"

"True Romanies? Or just gypsies?" I asked, surprised.

"Either. Which are the horse dealers?"

I nodded towards a short, swarthy man close by. "Him. He's one. His name's Henry Toupe."

"How do you know? Is he known to you?"

"I see him around and he's carrying his stick. If a gypsy's ready to trade, he carries a stick to indicate it. Do you want to speak to him?"

"In a moment." He paused, then said, "Where do they get their horses? They breed them, I suppose?"

"Yes. Much of the stock comes from Spain, Andalucía. There's a horse fair there once a year. Most of the gypsies go."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And what do you do?" he asked, suddenly confronting me with a question more direct than polite, and I was taken aback a little.

"Gamekeeping. I'm a gamekeeper."

"Ah. Yes. You always did like the outdoor life. Bit of a nature freak, yes?"

I felt affronted. "I don't see . . . what's freakish about it. I like to be in the woods and fields . . . it's a living."

"But you have an affinity with nature, don't you? Bit like a church to you, isn't it? Sanctified woods, sacred fields, the sepulchral mound of the mole?" The tone was mocking.

"Rubbish, man." I was beginning to get annoyed with him. He turned his attention back to the gypsy.

"Well, never mind, anyway. Those fellows—they have an affinity with horses. Superstitious as well—to the back teeth. Power over horses, and under the power of superstition. Remind you of anything?"

I started. "Good God, you're not *still* . . . you can't be. You *are*. You're serious."

He turned to face me again.

"I couldn't give it up like you, you see. Oh, you can sneer, but you escaped, damn you. I still had it all . . . the bloody kit to polish, the inane drills, the fucking lot. . . . I still had it, up to here." His eyes burned with a feverish anger and in spite of myself, my own irritation, I winced inwardly. Suddenly, he smiled, but somehow the smile seemed more threatening than the fury it had replaced. He said in a pleasant tone, "So, I continued our experiments, alone. Look, I'm going to have a word with that chap. You wait here. Afterwards I'll buy you a pint—for old times' sake. We'll celebrate my final escape. Don't go away . . ."

He left me and walked across the cobbled, strawstrewn square to speak to the gypsy. I watched as the big-boned, stocky man brought his face up to answer Jake, while Jake himself seemed to curve over, as if he were about to swallow the fellow. I wondered whether it would be prudent to just walk away, thinking that the bargaining would take some time—gypsies will haggle over a penny in a hundred pounds—but Jake was soon back.

"Made an appointment for later," he said. "Come on. Where's the nearest alehouse? What about over there?" He pointed to The King's Head.

"Not my local," I said, "but it sells beer."

"Good. Let's to it, man." He slapped my back and led the way.

We drank steadily, until evening came upon us, sifting through scattered incidents that were best left lying where they had fallen in earlier years. Finally I asked the question that I knew he had been waiting for.

"The gypsy. What do you really want with him?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jake's eyes glittered, partly with excitement and partly through having drunk more than his share.

"They know something I need to know. Our old religion, man . . . it still runs thick in my veins. Can't get it out now. Runs too deep. Mingled with my blood. Have you ever heard of the Gytrash?"

"The Gytrash?"

"That's it. No, you haven't, have you? Well, it's . . . it's a horse. A phantom horse. The gypsies believe in it—so do I. Surprises you, eh? The old hocus-pocus rubbish, yes? Well, I do believe it. The Gytrash. It appears . . . look, when you see it, it's a warning that a loved one, your nearest and dearest, is going to die. The Gytrash appears, black-coated and white-eyed and you know that death is at hand, ready to swat." He swallowed more of his beer at a rapid pace, his Adam's apple bobbing away in front of me.

I said, "Did you come here to buy a horse?"

His eyes met mine. They were the eyes I remembered, from the old Jake. Eyes do not change—they are the exception in the aging process of the human body. Old people can have clear blue eyes that look as though they belong to a baby.

"After you left I took the whole thing a little more seriously—began to explore libraries for the right kind of books. I learned a great deal. I thought we . . . well, the horse is a magnificent animal. It has grace in speed. It's powerful—muscularly powerful. Its lines are aesthetic. It has nobility . . ."

"Are you here to buy a horse?" I persisted.

"No. I'm here to talk—to the gypsies. I need to know certain things. Then I'll be ready."

I studied his face in the dim light. The dusk filled the hollows of his cheeks with dark shadows and I felt disturbed, uneasy in his presence. Here was a man with an obsession. The kind of obsession that permits no barriers, no morals, no principles to stand in its way. He had narrowed his perspective on the future to a bayonet point, and at that point stood the Gytrash.

I said, "If the . . . Gytrash appears only to those about to lose a loved one . . ."

"*The* loved one."

"All right. But what happens when you conjure its presence then? I mean, if it's supposed to be some kind of premonition—a warning—surely, calling it up might precipitate . . ."

"Someone has to die. Yes."

The tone was that of a man explaining a logical fact and a torpor took control of me, long enough to prevent me betraying my revulsion.

"Who?" I uttered, after a long while.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"In my case, a woman called Catherine." He said it so casually I almost struck him. Not in anger or disgust, but in spiritual anguish. His disregard for human feeling was unpalatable and I wanted desperately to be out of his influence. I was afraid that the corruption of his soul might be contagious and would permeate my own with its close proximity.

Distance. I wanted spiritual distance between us, before the decay became a shared experience and I was drawn too deeply into something that was fascinatingly repulsive to me. The problem was within myself. Since leaving military school I had lived in a placid pool of unchanging events, but somewhere in my nature revolution was waiting to erupt. I craved a momentous change, which I had always hoped would come from meeting someone with whom I would fall in love. Now I was afraid that something else might draw me out of that pool, something that was exciting through its sheer repulsiveness. Whether I believed in the Gytrash or not was immaterial. The fact was, Jake did, and he was prepared to sacrifice this Catherine to an indulgence in the black arts. He was offering someone he loved, the woman who presumably loved him, in exchange for a mystical experience. I, who had no one, who had not found such a woman, who would have fought with devils and demons to protect such a precious, rare quality as mutual love, was both appalled and intrigued by Jake's decision.

"Don't you think that this is a little bit insane?" I said.

He smiled. "Don't *you* think that's a rather trite remark? I expected better of you. Catherine is aware of what I'm doing—she's not only agreed to it, she's been a source of encouragement."

"Then you're both mad."

"Perhaps. It doesn't matter, does it? If we are, then nothing will happen. If not . . . well, you may not understand this, but some people are prepared to sacrifice everything they have—even love and life—for the ultimate experience. I know what you're thinking. What does *she* get out of it? What she gets is a special death. For some people, life is not the most precious gift. It's a burden . . ."

My blood felt as sluggish as mercury in my veins and I was finding it difficult to remain upright in my chair. I wanted to rest my head on a soft cushion, go to sleep, try to forget that people like Jake and Catherine existed. A wild thought came to me and I clutched at it.

"Is she a cripple?" I asked. "Or ill? In terrible pain?"

"Not physically. She's . . . spiritually oppressed. As I am. We need more than reality and death is a fantasy . . ."

"My God, I pity you. Both." I could have included myself but my ego would not allow it.

"That's rather arrogant. We don't need it." He glanced at his watch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now I must go. My appointment." He reached across with his hand and when I failed to take it, rested it on my shoulder for a moment.

"Perhaps we'll see each other again," he said. "I hope so." His face set into a hard mask. "I have to do this thing. You'll probably never understand—but I *have* to." Then he stood up and strode out of the pub, his tall, lean body stooping at the door before disappearing into the gloom beyond. I sat there for a long time, wondering how such a man had survived until now. Yet, as I reasoned, I knew how. He was a product of extremes—a combination of inflexible discipline and complete self-indulgence of spirit—which had resulted in a paradox: the rational lunatic. I did pity him, but I also envied him. He had an inner strength, a confidence that left me in awe of him. Had I that kind of strength, I could have . . . what? Gone on a quest for someone to share my life with me? You don't find that sort of person by searching for them. They happen in your way. The strange thing was, until Jake had mentioned those words—*the* loved one—I had not realized just how lonely I was. Now I felt destitute of emotion—hollow—not a real man at all. I was a walking effigy of men. A scarecrow. A straw man. Jake had revealed to me just how empty, how useless my life was, and had been since I had left the school. Yet, here was someone with the one thing I needed to make me whole, and he was prepared to throw it away for something—something transient, an evanescence, an experience as fleeting as a puff of smoke from a burning log. Somehow I stumbled from my chair and out into the blackness. There was a sharp wind blowing from the east which buffeted the pines that lined the road to Sutton Hall. Not looking up, I could hear them, tossing their dark manes above me, swishing their many tails beneath the lining of the sky.

Three nights later there was an urgent knocking on my cottage door. I put down the book I was reading and rose, reluctantly, to open it. To say I sensed it was Jake would be wrong. I *knew* it was him. I was familiar with the sound of John Sutton's knock and he was the only person who ever came to the cottage.

Jake stood before me, swaying slightly and exhaling plumes of cold air.

"Did you see it?" I cried, unable to prevent myself asking the question that had haunted me since our parting. Again, I knew before he had time to answer. It was evident in his whole demeanor. The suppressed excitement suffused his features until it seemed to me that his face had reverted to its childhood complexion: smooth and glowing like an infant freshly awakened from sleep.

"I saw it. . . ." he stepped inside and pulled at his gloves, feverishly. "I saw it. Let me tell you. I spent two days with the gypsies . . . then last night they took me out to the marshes. Left me there. I was terri-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fied. . . ." He shook his head and laughed, finally managing to pull one of his gloves off. "*Terrified.* It's one thing talking about it, but out there—it's so bleak. Just miles of dark reeds moving to the varying pressures of the wind, unseen hands pressing down the grasses. And desolate creeks of slick mud, shining under the starlight. There are birds out there, you know—of course, you do—but hundreds of them, crouched in banks of saltwort and bladderwrack. They fly out when you disturb them. Startles you. God, this is a lonely place you've chosen . . . the Essex marshes. I never felt so lonely in my life."

"The Gytrash . . ."

"Yes, yes. I know. Let me tell you. I did it all—the incantations, the symbols, the magic rites. Once I had begun I was okay—I felt only excitement. I knew it would come . . . and it did. That place has atmosphere—the perfect atmosphere. It reeks of old religions, pagan worship. I felt the presence of those pre-Christian gods. I smelled their breath on the wind. It stank of their foul odors—rank, yet charged with power. I felt puny and vulnerable under their observations. They cluster in those salt marshes, you know. The primal mud is their last refuge. . . ."

"But . . ."

"I know. Finally, at the termination of the mystical orisons, I called its name—and the sound formed a spiral in the night airs above the marshes, turning faster and faster, increasing its circle, until the sound became a whirlpool of vapor that formed a tunnel back through space and time, to antiquity, to the origin of folklore—and through this celestial tunnel he came, beautiful and black, the height of three houses and eyes white with the fires of death.

"It seemed to me that flying hooves struck the moon, as the beast descended to earth, set it spinning in a wheel of light—I was momentarily blinded by a magnificent refulgence which traveled along the back of the Gytrash—my hands, my face, my skin were alive with static—every hair on my body was drawn toward the beast, as if it were charged with a million volts of electricity. I remember screaming one word, half in fear, half in exaltation—'Catherine!' "

"Oh, my God," I cried. This madman was exuding evil, filling my house with its noxious fumes.

"Yes. It came." He spread his arms and seemed to fill the room, his dark overcoat still glistening with drops of moisture from the night mists. "Not just a horse—the Gytrash—I mean, it was *huge.* There was no mistaking it. I had been prepared for a trick—those gypsies are wily people, but not this. This creature—this supernatural beast. *Then* I was afraid. I turned to run. Like a coward, I turned to run. But it was there before me again, enormous, its black, muscled flanks shedding flakes of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

light, its mane and tail like textured darkness. . . . Each time I turned, it was there. I couldn't run. There was nowhere to run to.

"It reared up, over me, filling the sky with its giant form, and I thought I was going to die. I could see its great hooves, gleaming dully in the darkness above me, and I was going to be crushed like a beetle. It made no sound, you know—completely silent—yet I could see steam rushing from those cavernous nostrils, like volcanic dust-clouds. I felt the white-heat of its eyes. This was a god-horse—it was Aeton, Nonios, Abastor, Malech, Abraxas, all rolled into one. It was the four horses of the Apocalypse, it was Skinfaxi, it was Balios, it was Borak. I can't describe my feelings beyond that point—they were all bound up in that steed. I was part of it. . . ."

"Stop it!" I shouted. There was a ferment inside me. A terrible sense of doom permeated my spirit. I had a premonition of some ghastly, evil event that lay in the future, which had no shape or form, but which gripped my heart like a hand and threatened to squeeze it dry of blood. I could hardly breathe. The atmosphere in the room was stifling and I pushed past him to lean on the doorpost, gulping down draughts of cold air as if they had miraculous medicinal powers that would remove the stains with which he had darkened my soul. "Stop it, for God's sake."

"There's not much more to tell," he said in a quiet voice. "It came down, astride me, and then galloped away, into the night. I'm going back to London now. . . . Perhaps we'll see each other again soon?"

"No," I said, flatly. "I don't want to hear from you." I turned to face him and he shrugged.

"Well . . . good luck." He went out into the night, leaving me wretched and miserable in the open doorway. It was difficult to know which of my feelings was most dominant. Horror was there, and anger, and fear—but if there was a ruling passion, it was *envy*. I am ashamed to say I felt an overwhelming envy at having been so close to such an experience, yet not part of it. Damn him, I could have killed him then. He had disturbed my spirit, stirred it into a maelstrom of conflicting emotions, and now that it was active I could not see how I was going to find peace again.

By the next morning I had convinced myself that Jake had taken some drug—something that had produced a hallucination of the image he craved so much. I did not want to believe in the Gytrash because if I did I would never rest easy again. I left the cottage and made my way to Hadleigh Downs, where Henry, the gypsy Jake had spoken to, kept his herd of horses. They were there, grazing on the meadow grass, and as I approached them they began cantering away, some thirty of them—grays, roans, piebalds, and one beautiful palamino with its honey-colored mane and tail floating like satin as it wheeled with the others, away from a corner.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Henry was by the trough with his black and white mongrel, and he looked up as I approached, his swarthy face closing down its natural geniality as he recognized me. My office of gamekeeper had done nothing for my popularity amongst the gypsies, since the time I had to prosecute them for poaching.

" 'Morning," I said.

He replied in kind, but guardedly.

I nodded toward his herd. "Nice horses."

He sniffed. "You know about horses, then?"

"Used to do a lot of riding . . . not so now."

"That don't make you some'un who knows about horses. Lots o' people ride 'em, but don't know forelocks from withers."

"I know one man who does—the man that spoke to you about the Gytrash."

Henry nodded. "Him?" The little man squared his chest, stretching the string that served as buttons on his brown waistcoat. "Yep, he knew all right. Knew about horses."

"What did you tell him about the Gytrash, Henry?" I said, coming to the point of my visit.

His eyes crinkled at the corners. He may have been smiling but it was difficult to tell. Thickset and hard, he stood like a proud rock beside the water trough, solid, immovable. In him were all the secrets of the stones. Though a "settled" gypsy he was still closer to the natural, the dark elements of nature, than most men alive.

"Are you going to tell me?" I said.

"You want to know if he saw it?"

My silence conveyed my answer.

"You *have* to know, don't 'un? Desperate passions, those o' yours. Dangerous ones, I think. Well, I'll say this—his soul's damned. I warned 'im. I warned 'im hard, but he took not a bit o' notice. That fellow's a goner. Ain't no saving the lost. Stay away from things like that, gamekeeper. There's more bad in them than a sane man can tell."

"You think he's insane?" I said, hopefully, grasping at the single word I had wanted to hear.

"He will be. Don't you think he won't. You can't pluck things out o' the darkness and then go home an' forget 'em. Once they got a hold of your mind, they don't let go—like my old dog over there," he pointed. "Once he's got 'is teeth into a rag, you won't get 'un back except it's in tatters. A soul in tatters is a mind that's mad, gamekeeper. Stay away from 'un."

He walked off then, without a backward glance. The confirmation I had required had been shredded for me by Henry. And I? I was nothing. A mere bystander content to wear a blindfold. Then there was Catherine.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She was to die, if she was not already dead. The sacrifice. The willing sacrifice.

For the next two months I spent restless days at my work, fixing fences, ripping out poachers' snares and generally carrying on with my duties with half a mind. At night I would sit up, staring out of the window into the darkness, wondering about the things that lay in wait out there. I would sit until I was too tired to keep my eyes open and either fall asleep in the chair or crawl away to my bed. I saw Henry several times, but we merely acknowledged each other with a nod or wave of the finger. Then, one afternoon, I returned to the cottage for a bite of food, and found Jake sitting outside on my window bench.

His appearance penetrated any security I had salvaged since our last meeting. He had always been a thin man, but now he was emaciated, haggard and brittle-looking. He raised two red-rimmed eyes at my approach and the sorrow I saw in their depths, the anguish and grief, was frightening.

"You'd better come in," I said, unlocking the door with a trembling hand.

He entered, a wraith-like figure whose clothes hung from him. It seemed that if I were to touch him, he would crumble into nothing but dust and sighs. He sat in the chair; hung from it rather.

"She died then?" I said, softly.

"Yes." The sound was a mere breath of wind from between his lips.

"Poor Catherine," I murmured. "I didn't know her, but . . ."

His head jerked up. "Not Catherine." His voice was as dry as old paper, rustling. "Not her. She's still . . . alive."

"Who then? Somebody died. You just said so." I could feel something stirring in my blood—that ominous presence that had been with me on the night he had told me about the Gytrash.

"I don't know."

"You don't know? I . . . where's the understanding in this?"

His hands came together like two bundles of sticks. With a dry, rasping sound he rubbed them together.

"This. Catherine didn't die, therefore someone did. I came to tell you this before . . . There's nothing left for me. Nothing. She's gone, you see. The one person that could have changed my life. I killed her . . . murdered her with my selfish obsession."

"This is ludicrous . . ."

"No. No, it's not." His eyes were a sulphurous yellow, and hot upon my own.

"Meaning what, for God's sake?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I called the Gytrash prematurely—that meant someone would have to die . . ."

"Yes, yes. You told me that. A loved one . . . the closest to you."

There were bitter tears now, and I turned away, embarrassed for him.

"Don't you see," he said. "Not someone I *know*—someone I hadn't met. I called it up prematurely. Someone—a woman who would have loved me—whom I would have loved more deeply than I have ever loved anyone—that someone died. I don't even know her name. She died before we met and I destroyed myself with her—any purpose I had in this world—Catherine is still alive. It wasn't her. I spoke to the gypsies thinking that it was just a matter of time, but they said no, the night after. The night after I called the Gytrash, my love . . ." his voice cracked. "She would have died. I killed a woman that could have saved me. The one person on this earth with whom I could have shared this *life*—do you understand now?"

My cheeks were tight against the bone.

"Yes. I think so. Out there, amongst the unknown masses, was . . ."

"Her. I can't even put flowers on her grave. I can't even wet the earth with these useless tears. *I never even knew her!* Everywhere I go, each place, I think, *did she live here? Was that her house? Perhaps she visited this pub or dined at this restaurant?* I look for signs of her—signs I would not even recognize. I see women in the street and wonder, *was she like that? Did she have blonde hair, or brown? What color were her eyes? Did her laughter sound like that woman's laughter? Was she wise, tender, understanding, serious, humorous, intelligent?* I have nothing but questions, and no answers. How can *you* know . . . ?"

"I don't know. I can't know. Neither can you. Perhaps you're tormenting yourself for nothing, Jake. Maybe . . . maybe what you saw was contained in your own mind? A hallucination. Maybe no one has died."

His sallow cheeks tightened. Bitterness replaced the sorrow in his eyes.

"Yes. I know that much. I saw the Gytrash. A woman died, somewhere, out there in the world. I killed her, whoever she was. You only get one opportunity and I've obliterated mine. I destroyed it before it had a chance to happen. Ugly, isn't it? Terribly, terribly ugly. Well, that's that. I've left Catherine. Not her fault. She's got her chance to come. So have you. Give Catherine a call—you never know—some good might come out of this."

He stood up and walked towards the door. I stretched out a hand to stop him. "Stay here the night, Jake, we'll talk about it in the morning."

He hesitated, then said, "I am so tired. Maybe you're right." He ran a hand through his matted, disheveled hair. There was a bleakness in his expression that worried me. I did not want him doing anything stupid. He was so obviously distraught and under tremendous internal pressure.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He said, "I'm sorry—to drag you into all this."

"It's all right," I lied. "This whole thing could be wrong, you know—you're working on assumptions. Let's get some sleep, then try to rationalize it all."

He smiled grimly. "You can't rationalize emotions, not with talk, not with argument. You—I know what you think—that the human mind is—strange—powerful. You're hoping that what I saw out on the marshes was the product of a distorted reality—perceptions warped by an intense, overactive imagination; by heightened senses in a fever-ridden atmosphere. It's not so. I wish it were. That black beast appeared to me—and I have to take the consequences of promoting that appearance. I feel it here. . . ." He tapped his chest, over his heart. "I *know* she's gone. I know the world is lighter of one human being—the one that could have made me whole, with a relationship that I can never now experience. You were right—I exchanged a lightning thrill for a complete life. I destroyed two people that night—and I was one of them. The other, I'll never know."

"Sleep," I insisted. "You're worn down to nothing. Let's talk tomorrow."

He nodded and I showed him to my bedroom. I left him there and went down to the sofa, where I spent an uncomfortable and restless night. When the morning came the sparrows woke me, clustering in a tree outside my window. I lay there for a few minutes observing the changing fragments of gray caught between the stark, crazed network of branches and recalled the events of the previous evening. I felt numb inside. What was I going to say to him that would help him in any way? You cannot convince a man whose whole mind has reshaped itself around a negative idea, that he is wrong. I could produce nothing in the way of evidence to substantiate an argument that ran counter to his belief. He believed he had precipitated the death of his one chance of happiness. *You only get one chance.* And what did I believe?—that he had created a state of mind which had enabled him to externalize his subconscious desires: that the scenes on the marshes were fantasies projected through his eyes, onto the screen of an empty landscape: that what he had witnessed was the showing of a celluloid dream filmed by his receptive mind? Yet, his conviction that his future love had perished had formed dark lanes in my rationalization. My mind rejected his beliefs, but my soul absorbed them eagerly, as confirmation of its earlier acceptance of a superphysical world beyond blood, flesh, and bone, where one was safe from the thunder of the Captains; safe from the horrors of ritual and order; safe from a life in which actions were repetitive and timed to precision, and impulsiveness, initiative, spontaneity and eccentricity were taboo. If he could have found love, real love, with its wild, energetic gestures and chaotic motion, he would have been safe. Love plays havoc with order. Love is delightful in its irrationality and its scorn of discipline. Love fashions its clocks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from ill-fitting cogs of emotion and wheels of impulse. I rose and made two coffees, taking one upstairs to give to Jake.

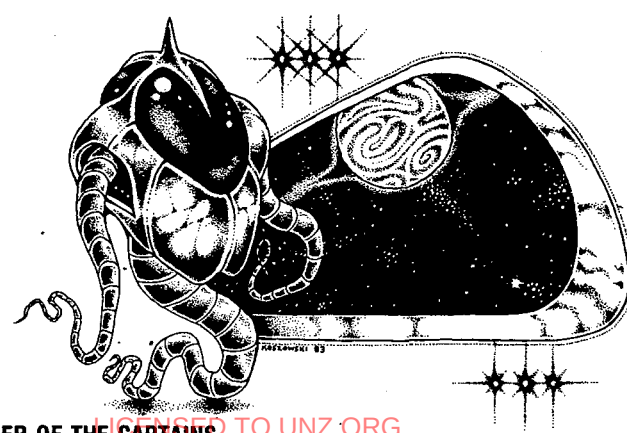
He was gone.

I stood there, stupidly holding the hot coffee, and stared at the state of the room. Bewilderment gradually dawned into a kind of comprehension. He had left the room in complete order. The blankets had been folded into an immaculate bedpack, squared and sharply creased, at the top of the bed. He had taken all my toilet articles and laid them out neatly, conforming to the diagrams we had followed for military inspections. My shoes were in a row at the end of the bed, lace-ends tucked tightly into the top two eyeholes. Shirts, suits, underwear, socks, ties—all were folded in the correct military manner and displayed according to regulations. Even my writing materials, pad, envelopes and pens, had been placed precisely in their correct mandatory positions on the bedside cabinet. The whole room had been dusted and straightened to a stark, clean, dull uniformity.

It was a chilling sight.

I knew then that nothing could save him. His determination was evident in that display of regimentation and order. Whether he had done it consciously, as some kind of sign to me, or because of some inner compulsion over which he had no control, I never discovered. The Captains had won after all. They had broken him.

A week later, I went to the funeral. It was a small, dismal affair attended by one or two military types, and Catherine. She and I exchanged only a few words; the guilt, whether justified or not, forced us apart quickly, like two magnets of the same polarities. Neither of us, I am sure, felt we had anything in common that was not linked by Jake—sad to say—for it might have indicated something. ●



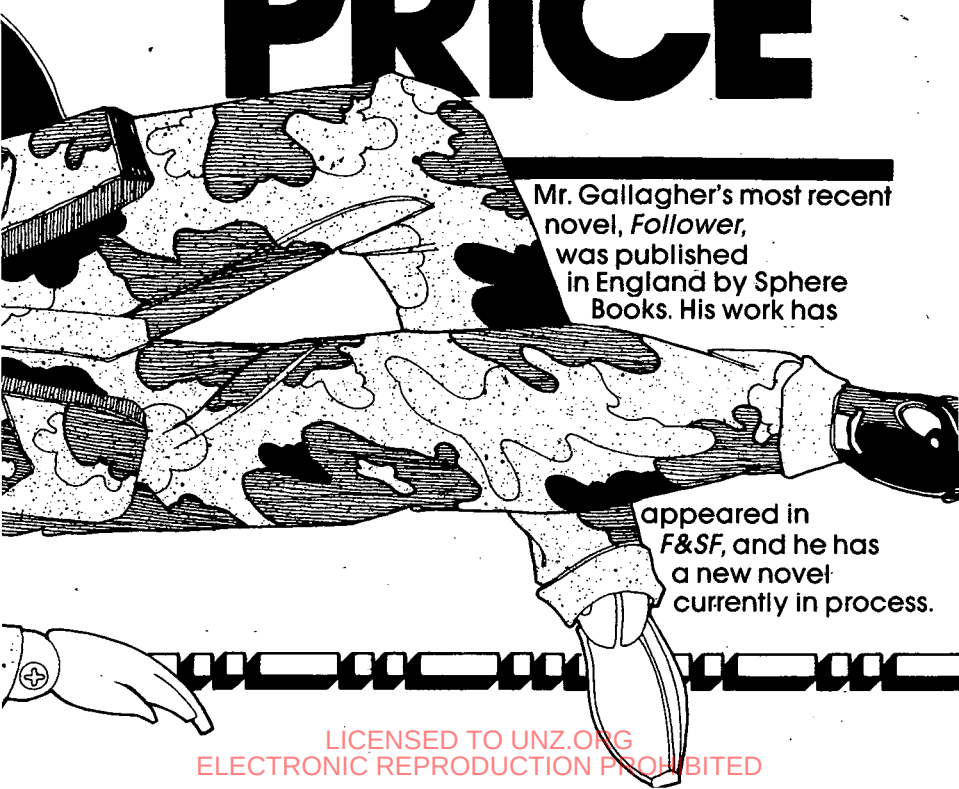
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

art: George Thompson

by Stephen Gallagher

THE PRICE



Mr. Gallagher's most recent novel, *Follower*, was published in England by Sphere Books. His work has appeared in *F&SF*, and he has a new novel currently in process.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As far as Lisa was concerned, weekends were for catching up. This weekend had been something of an exception, mostly because of Richard DeSimone; he was the record company executive who'd done most of the dealing with them since Nick had signed the new contract, and he'd driven up late on the Friday night to spend the next two days being flattered and feted and generally treated as if his opinions were worth anything more than the handful of mouse droppings that Bob Ingram would have given for them under any other circumstances. Ingram's act was a model of restraint, and a constant entertainment to Lisa. He stayed close to DeSimone, nodding at his wisdom and showing all the right reactions to his insights, of which he seemed to have a bottomless store. DeSimone had jet-black hair and the seamless good looks of a public schoolboy; these were spoiled by his eyes, which were small and squalid and snakelike. He seemed to be about twenty-four.

It was generally acknowledged that Nick couldn't hit the side of a slow-moving bus with a shotgun, and so it was no surprise to anybody when he didn't appear at the Saturday shoot. Nothing was in season yet, but there was a skeet range up on the moors that was reached by a wet and bumpy drive in one of the estate's Land Rovers. DeSimone contrived to sit next to Lisa, and to press against her for most of the journey. Lisa had worked as the organization's press secretary from the very beginning, and she'd believed that she was familiar with every species of media creep; but now she could only stare out of the Rover's window and try not to shudder.

DeSimone—whose country-squire jacket and green wellingtons looked suspiciously new—had been secretary of his college rifle club, and he'd made sure they knew it. Unfortunately his targeting also turned out to be in the slow-moving bus league, and Ingram and Lisa had a difficult time making certain that he stayed ahead. He talked about the bad light, the unfavorable wind, and how much better this kind of thing tended to be up in Scotland. It was his theory on the genetic basis of a woman's inadequacy with any kind of firearm, meant as a reassurance in the light of Lisa's miserable score, that finally caused her to catch Bob Ingram's eye. Ingram's response was a slight, resigned shrug, as if he'd already seen the likely results of the weekend and knew that there was little they could do to change anything.

DeSimone's next attempt was a double-miss. Lisa quickly raised her own gun, and blasted both of his clays out of the air before they'd even begun to fall.

They sat on opposite sides of the cab for the return journey.

On Saturday evening they gave him the works—a long dinner, a log fire, single malt whisky and the best grass available to supplement the small complimentary pharmacy that had been laid out in the guest bed-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

room before his arrival. By then the strain was starting to show on Bob Ingram, and a couple of times when DeSimone's back was turned Ingram had run through a rapid-fire range of derisory gestures so sudden and intense that Lisa had to stage a coughing fit or be caught laughing.

On Sunday, they finally got down to business.

Lisa stayed in the ground-floor room that had been set aside as her office, catching up on some letters. Bob Ingram's office was a larger suite next door, and that was where he and Nick and Richard De Simone spent the entire afternoon without even calling for coffee. There was a tense kind of atmosphere over the whole house; Tony Patranella, Nick's long-time driver and more-or-less bodyguard, came wandering through on the pretext of wanting to ask Lisa something, and then forgot what it was. He kept glancing at the connecting door through to Ingram's suite, and the small-talk would falter and his apprehension would show. Like everyone else in the organization—the "shareholders," as Ingram called the core group—his future depended on Nick Fulton. And Nick Fulton's own future was the subject under discussion.

When Tony was finally out of the way, Lisa checked her watch. She hadn't counted on him hanging around for so long, and now she hadn't much time. From the desk drawer beside her she took the small bundled-up package that she'd prepared in the hours before DeSimone's arrival and then, leaving the electric typewriter running as an indication that she'd only stepped out for a moment, she left her office and headed for the stairs.

The house dated back to Georgian times, the lease to a more recent era when it had been the form for every big rock star to own a manor in the country. The kids loved to see it, all those Sunday-supplement features with the latest mad, bad upstart lounging around in leather trousers against a baronial backdrop. It seemed the ultimate put-down of everything that had gone before, to fill such a place with hangers-on and to treat it carelessly. Bob Ingram had let the situation run until they'd got the publicity that he wanted, and then he'd ruthlessly cleared out the human debris and brought the decent furniture back out of storage. The image now was more sedate; Nick's fans had grown up, and most would have homes of their own.

Ingram was sharp, all right.

The main guest bedroom was down at the end of the upper hallway. The hallway itself seemed as broad as the deck of a liner, broad enough to have full-sized tables set with flowers down its center with still a car's-width of space on either side. There was nobody around; the housekeeper didn't come in on Sundays, and everybody else was lurking downstairs hoping to hear something of the closeted discussions. The guest room

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wouldn't be made-over until the morning, which suited Lisa's plans exactly.

The curtains were half-drawn, and DeSimone's suitcase lay packed but open on the bed. He was a messy packer, she noted as she went around the bed to the dressing-table, and even though he'd only spent two nights in here the air was distinctly unfresh. She resisted the urge to open a window; she didn't want to leave any signs that she'd been around.

She removed the rubber band that had been holding together the package that she'd taken from her drawer, and she spread the contents out on the dressing-table. One thin plastic trash bag, holding everything together. A roll of smaller polythene bags with wire twist-ties. Tweezers. Scissors. An eyedropper in a brown glass bottle. One clean bedsheet, folded. A pair of pink rubber gloves.

She put the gloves on before she did anything else, and then she lifted the open suitcase from the bed and set it on the floor without disturbing anything. She threw back the duvet cover, and carefully removed and folded the lower sheet; this went into the trash bag, which she then knotted to keep it sealed before she remade the bed—not *too* well—with the new sheet and replaced everything as it had been before.

The next stage was the part that she'd been looking forward to the least. Collecting her kit together, she went through into the bathroom.

DeSimone had been as messy in here as he'd been outside. The floor was awash with cold, soapy water from the shower, and he'd thrown down most of the clean towels to soak this up so that he could walk around. On the tiled floor of the shower stall a ring of shampoo suds had dried hard, and a few tiny hairs like dark question marks lay beached around the drain. Using the tweezers and fighting her revulsion, Lisa gathered these together and dropped them, tweezers and all, into one of the smaller bags.

Now came the worst.

She lifted the toilet lid. As she'd expected—*hoped* was too strong a word for it—the toilet hadn't been flushed. Essence of DeSimone was held there, tanked and rank, and she was going to have to reach down into the bowl and gather some in with the eyedropper. Her hands were sweating inside the rubber as she did it, feeling unclean and tainted by the closeness even though there was no actual contact. Nurses do this all the time, she told herself.

They're welcome to it, was her next, unbidden thought.

As soon as she'd finished she slammed the lid down and stood up and took her first breath in more than a minute. The bottle went into another bag, twisted and wire-tied, and then she resisted the urge to gather her stuff together and run for as long as it took to lift the cistern lid and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reconnect the rod that linked the flush to the handle. She'd unhooked it herself, only hours before as the others had been finishing breakfast.

She made one stop on the way back, to stow everything in the bottom of the wardrobe in her own room. She'd burn the gloves at the first opportunity; but for the moment, she was going to go back to her typewriter as if nothing had happened. On the way down the stairs, she checked her watch; she'd been gone for little more than six minutes.

Around four-thirty, Lisa took off her audio headset just in time to hear a car being started outside. She went to the big window and checked and saw that, yes, DeSimone was leaving. It was almost worth a celebration. She'd known illnesses that had been more welcome.

She gave it a couple of minutes, and then went to the connecting door.

Bob Ingram was sitting in the big padded swivel chair, the one he didn't like to use. He'd pushed it away from the desk, and tilted it so that he could sit back and look at the ceiling. One of the shotguns, the one with the expensive engraved scrollwork that they'd bought in for DeSimone, lay across his knees.

Lisa said, "Things aren't *that* bad, are they?"

Ingram looked down at the gun as if he'd forgotten that he was holding it. "They're not so great, Lisa, old girl," he said, and he tipped himself forward and laid the gun carefully on the desk.

"I thought you were going to present him with that at the end of the stay."

"Well-greased and up his back passage with both barrels ready to fire, maybe. But I'm not wasting seven hundred quid of Nick's money for no results, and that's what we'd get."

Lisa looked around. Ingram seemed to be alone. She said, "Where *is* Nick?"

"He lost interest and wandered off towards the end. I can't honestly say that I blame him."

"No good news, then," Lisa said, as if she really had to ask, and she hitched herself up to sit on the corner of Ingram's desk. There was plenty of room.

Ingram sighed, the sound of anger that had been suppressed for so long that it had become stale. "They've screwed up the last two years, and they're not prepared to lose face in front of each other by admitting it. Nick Fulton's sales are trying to crawl under a duck, so Nick Fulton has to carry the can. Regardless of the fact that they sneaked out two albums in the slowest part of the year, and then picked out a singles track with a reference to oral sex in the lyric so blatant that it was *guaranteed* no radio station in the country would give it airplay. They probably let the cleaning ladies pick the album covers while we didn't even get a look in on the marketing side, and now they've got the utter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brass to say that Nick can't hold his sales anymore. No," he concluded, getting to his feet, "the news is not good."

And then he went out to break it to the others, leaving Lisa alone.

And thinking.

Late that evening, she drove out to the station to meet a train. Nothing much ran on the line anymore and Sunday was its slowest day, and so she found herself waiting alone in the old Victorian ladies-room with an old-fashioned iron stove fighting the chill from the corner. The place was a dusty relic of days gone by, and when the line closed down it would probably stand empty and ghosted for a few years until somebody bought it and turned the offices into bedrooms and set tubs of bright flowers out along the platform. They'd probably keep bees, and maybe a goat to crop the grass down where the rails had been. Nothing like it would ever be built again; it was a piece of the past, and the bubble was closing.

The train was late, and came in at eleven.

Only one passenger got off, a middle-aged man in jeans and an American air force flying jacket. He had a straggly, curly beard, and his long hair had been tied back with an elastic band to hang like a ponytail. His only luggage was a canvas tote bag. He came down the platform to Lisa, recognizing her instantly even though it had been a couple of years since they'd last met. They made an awkward handshake. He hadn't changed and neither, Lisa supposed, had she. They then went out to her car; he slung his bag into the back, and then they both climbed in for the return to the manor.

"So," she said, half an hour later, "how's Jim?"

They were in the kitchen now, sharing a late supper. Jim Louri was his name, and he was tearing through the game pie as if he hadn't eaten in a week. "Jim's fine, family's fine," he said as she slid a can of beer across the table to him. "Sharon brought her first boyfriend home last weekend. Words cannot *describe* how that made me feel."

"And business?"

"Lousy. Nobody's touring. I don't suppose there's anything going with your boy?"

"Touchy subject right now. Times have been brighter."

Louri had been a bass guitarist in a third-division heavy metal band until early arthritis had found its way into his hands; now he mostly made his living as a gofer and fixer for other acts on tour. The disease in his knuckles had at least saved his dignity, because the band had been going nowhere. Louri was the only one of them who'd stayed in the business, the rest going back to regular jobs.

"Okay," he said at last, pushing himself back from the table, "that's the small-talk out of the way. Now tell me who you want to hurt."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lisa was taken aback by this directness; uncertain of her ground and working with an understanding that had been founded mainly on rumor, she'd been wondering how she was going to introduce the subject that had been uppermost in her mind when she'd telephoned Jim Louri on the Thursday evening. "Simple as that?" she said, and Louri nodded.

"Simple as that. We do it now, you pay me tonight, and I leave in the morning. No guarantees on results and no second tries, either. You want to mess around some more, you do it on your own. That costs you nothing. I'm just a consultant here."

Lisa hesitated for a moment, and then she took the plunge.

"His name's DeSimone," she said.

"Would I know him?"

"I don't think so. He's a little fish who thinks he's a shark. He knows nothing, which is just enough to make him a problem for us."

"A problem how?"

"He's the record exec in charge of Nick's case. That means that when he screws up—which he's doing—Nick's career goes down the toilet and the rest of us follow."

Louri nodded again, thinking it over. "So what you *really* need is a charm for success."

"Nick doesn't need any charms for success. He's a solid-gold talent. What he needs is the debris taken out of his way."

Louri watched her for a moment. She didn't doubt that her determination was there for anyone to see. Then he said, "Okay. Did you get everything like I told you?"

"I got it," she said.

She left him for a while as she went upstairs; she'd a vague explanation in mind that she was going to use if any of the others should see Louri and wonder why he'd come to visit, but everything was quiet and it seemed unlikely that she'd need it. All the same, she was hoping that she'd be able to get him away in the morning without anybody else even knowing that he'd been around. Louri had a certain reputation, after all, or Lisa would never have known to contact him.

She collected everything that she needed from her wardrobe and left her room, closing the door quietly behind her. She could hear faint music coming from Nick's own suite at the far end of the landing. Tony Patranella and a couple of the others would probably be playing cards for Monopoly money in one of the other rooms, but everybody else seemed to have gone to bed, probably to lie awake worrying about whatever was going to happen. They had good reason, because when Bob Ingram became despondent it was a sure sign that things were going really badly. He was, in his unpretentious East-end market-trader's way, a strategic genius in business matters, and if he said that the outlook was bleak

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then it was something that you had to believe. Bleak was what he seemed to be saying now, and so as far as Lisa was concerned this opened the way for the desperate measures.

Down in the kitchen, Jim Louri had unpacked his tote bag and set everything out; Lisa saw a big cheap edition hardbacked book, some handwritten notes, scissors, tape, and a stick of stationery paste. She also saw that he'd cleared the kitchen table and dragged it across the stone floor so that it now stood under the old ceiling-suspended drying rack over on the far side of the room. He'd spread out a sheet of new brown wrapping paper shiny side-up on the tabletop, and now he was unwinding the waxed line from its cleat so that he could lower the rack to within reach. Lisa set her own collection down alongside his.

"What did you get?" he said, coming over, and so she showed him the bagged hairs from the shower stall and the tiny bottle of diluted urine.

"Just don't ask how I got it," she said.

"You've got his sheet?"

"In the laundry bag."

"And what about a doll for the Volt?"

Now, faintly embarrassed, she brought out the last of her items; not anything that she'd taken from DeSimone's room, but something that she'd bought from the charity shop in the village on Friday morning. "I didn't make anything," she said, "but I got this. I was never much at art. Will it do?"

He took it from her, with a look that said that he'd seen some weird interpretations of a Volt before but never one quite like this. It was an Action Man combat soldier, the kind with the movable Eagle Eyes; its limbs had all twisted at odd angles in the bottom of the bag, like those of a body hit by a severe shockwave that had left the skin intact whilst breaking every bone inside. He hadn't been too well cared for, because his dogtags had gone and one of his plastic boots was missing. Louri held the doll in his own somewhat distorted hand and said, "Well, it's novel. But I don't see why not." And then he held it out for her to take back. "Look, you work on this while I see to the sheet. You want to cut a hole in the chest big enough to take an egg, and then we'll need an egg to go in it. One that was bought without any haggling over the price. Is that any problem?"

"Nobody haggles in a supermarket these days. I'll get one from the fridge."

Cutting the chest open with a Stanley knife was tough going, and faintly unpleasant; the doll's Eagle Eyes seemed to be watching her with reproach, and she had to turn its head aside. Louri, meanwhile, carefully unfolded the sheet on the wrapping paper and pegged its corners to the rack so that he could hoist it up to hang straight. When he'd done this,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he took a broad kitchen knife and began to tap gently at the flat center of the sheet. Nothing spectacular happened, but after a couple of minutes there was a discernible buildup of white flecks on the paper beneath.

Skin scales.

Lisa finished her work on the Volt as Louri was gathering the scales and the hair together on a piece of cling-wrap. The hole that she'd made was just about big enough now that she'd cut away some of the interior molding as well, but it was ragged around the edges. Louri told her that this didn't matter as he tucked the twist of cling-wrap down into the body cavity, and then he turned to the egg.

Lisa must have been looking doubtful, because he said, "Something wrong?"

"I suppose not," she said. "It's just that . . . I didn't really think of stuff like cling-wrap and factory-farm eggs having much of a place in something like this."

"Got to adapt, use what you can," Louri told her. He was starting to make a careful cut into the shell at the broad end of the egg. "Have you ever actually *tried* to get hold of milk that three bats have drowned in?"

"We get stuff that tastes like it, sometimes."

"Well, you see the problem. If you want to pay really big money I can put you onto someone who'll turn up all dressed in black and he'll talk like he's in an echo chamber all the time and he'll tell you that he uses nothing that isn't one hundred percent authentic. You need a piece of a virgin's liver, he's got it. Babies' blood, no problem. His day job's a technician in a hospital pathology lab, see? He'll put on a good show, but in the end he won't give you any better guarantees than I will."

"I thought you didn't give guarantees."

"That's right. Pass me the sticky tape, will you?"

After opening the egg, he'd drawn out the white but let the yolk stay in, and then he'd filled up the space inside the shell with urine from the eyedropper. Now he put a piece of clean paper over the hole, and sealed this in place with a piece of tape. The complete egg was then fitted into the prepared chest of the Volt, and the whole thing taped around several times. It looked swollen and deformed, faintly obscene.

"Now, what you do," Louri said, "is bury this somewhere that it won't be disturbed. As the egg rots, your man gets jaundice. You want to put an end to it, you dig it up and you burn the egg. Otherwise it just gets worse until he dies." He shrugged, but his eyes were serious. "If that's what you want, it's what you want. Here."

And he handed her the Volt. It was just a toy and an egg and a few scraps of nothing, but the real weight was in the responsibility that came with it. And the responsibility was all hers now. She looked at Jim Louri; but Louri was already repacking his tote bag.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She gave him DeSimone's room, although she didn't tell him that, and she left him with the envelope of money that represented all of her easily-accessible savings. She carried the Volt carefully, well away from herself as if it was a hot source, and in her own room she laid it in a drawer so that she could close it away and not have to look at it. The bulge of the egg under the tape was like some gross tumor. She was nervous, and she was more than a little awed at the process she'd started.

And what if there was nothing in it? There probably wasn't. She knew that her faith was only the faith of desperation, the powerful will to believe in anything at all that offered hope in a hopeless situation. She also knew that she was too old to be starting in a typing pool for peanuts-by-the-hour. The desk in the corner, the coffee break, the quick dash out to get some shopping in the lunch hour. Leaving collections. The Christmas party.

She shivered, closed the drawer on the Volt's sightless Eagle Eyes, and started to undress. She tried not to think of the egg yolk in the middle of the tumor, already under attack and beginning to curdle.

"You ever check up on your results?" she asked Louri the next morning as they drove out again toward the railway station. She'd taken him breakfast in his room, and smuggled him out via the back stairs; nobody, as far as she could tell, had seen them go. As far as history was concerned, Jim Louri's visit hadn't even taken place.

"I never check," he said. "For all I know, it's just a big waste of time. And if it isn't, I don't *want* to know."

"If it all works out, I'll send you a bonus."

"No bonuses. It's all in your hands now. But I'll give you one last piece of advice."

She glanced across the car at him. "What?"

He wasn't smiling. "Don't let it go too far. Because you may get what you want, but there's always a price and I'm not talking about money. Whoever makes these things happen, he's got a weird sense of humor."

Louri's words were still in her mind as she drew in by the small country station. The stopping-train wasn't due for another hour, but by unspoken agreement she wasn't going to wait with him.

" 'Bye, Jim," she said as he got out of the car under the station's wooden awning. The building behind him looked like an old gingerbread house in fading red and cream. "Best of luck."

"And you," he said as he shouldered his tote bag, and then he slammed the car door and walked away. He didn't look back; services had all been rendered, responsibility had all been transferred.

And his warning was still in Lisa's mind as she turned the car around and headed for home.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The first thing that she noticed on her return was that Nick's Porsche was missing from the gravelled turnaround in front of the house. Bob Ingram collared her as she came in through the main door and said, "Lisa? You free?"

"Far as I know," she told him. He seemed to be in a hurry, but there was also something else; it was almost a sense of oiled gears turning fast as a smooth machine ran, the unmistakable buzz that Bob Ingram gave off when he was setting something up. And Bob Ingram was *always* setting something up, although last night Lisa had received the impression that their options and their opportunities to act had been reduced almost to zero.

He said, "Staff meeting in the main lounge in half an hour. Not the whole staff, just the shareholders."

"But Nick isn't here, is he?" Lisa said, thinking about the missing Porsche.

"That's the whole point," Ingram told her. "I'll explain everything then."

Lisa went up to her room to take off her jacket. Could it be that Ingram had a plan for getting them out of this? She only had the undercurrent to go on, but she certainly hoped that she'd read it right—because apart from assuring their futures, successful action from Ingram now would make her own tawdry little scheme unnecessary. It was looking pretty stupid in daylight, anyway; but stupid or not, there was still something about the nature of it that scared her. She could assert her disbelief as much as she liked, but she couldn't get rid of that small, cold pebble of fear.

The explanation was simple. She'd believed that she was ruthless enough, but now she'd found that she wasn't. As long as the Volt existed, regardless of any of its dubious magical properties, it was a testament to a personality that she didn't want to own. Perhaps that was the true value of the magic, as balm to those who were sick with the desire for vengeance or fulfillment and who were simply sent to sit in a corner where they could nurse their obsessions as the world turned without them.

If this was what the Volt truly said about her, then she didn't want any part of it.

But what could Bob Ingram be planning?

It might simply be that he was going to break the bad news to the shareholders in a formal way. Their stake in Nick Fulton was, after all, legal as well as professional; it all dated back to a time five years before when Nick had missed three concert dates because of his involvement with "That Chinese Kid," to quote Ingram's phrase. Ingram had person-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ally tracked the two of them down and yanked Nick out of the seedy hotel room where they'd been hiding, and the subsequent out-of-court settlement with the tour promoter had wiped out the organization's cash reserves for a three-month period. The shareholder group had been created then, all of them agreeing to work on without pay for a four percent stake in the big guy's future. None of them had drawn a salary check since, but they'd all done pretty well out of it.

The Volt stared up at her from the open drawer, a bland mask of a face that even *looked* a bit like DeSimone if you ignored the macho little cheek scar that the manufacturers had added. She was going to get rid of it.

Eventually.

She went down to the main lounge before the half-hour was up, but the meeting had already started without her. The four others were sitting around as Bob Ingram stood before the log fire. Tony Patranella was saying, "So what's the exact score?" as Lisa let herself in and joined them.

"We've got two more years of contract to run," Bob Ingram said, and he started to tick off on his fingers. "They'll schedule two albums, but with no new production; both are going to be patched together from the tracks we haven't released. They'll float a couple of singles, but there's no question of any promotional budgets, no videos, nothing. They'll just cream off the easy revenue from the hard-core fans, and that's it."

"And after the contract?"

"Zero, zilch. No suggestion of renewal, and it's going to be difficult to get anyone else to look at us seriously after that. Meanwhile I'm supposed to be assured that they know what they're doing after listening to that little snot" (DeSimone, without a doubt) "lecture me on the music business for two hours. I was making a living out of the music business while he was sitting in his own cack watching *Camberwick Green*."

It certainly seemed that, after taking a hand in Nick's decline, those involved had come to an unspoken agreement that their own careers now depended on his continued failure. Anything else, any new ideas, could only reflect badly on their own earlier efforts. Success following a change of direction would be an unpleasant kind of exposure.

Lisa said, "How did Nick take it?"

"Not a crack," Ingram said with dry precision. "I hate to think what it's really doing to him. If they'd presented us with a series of straight, expedient business decisions, then that wouldn't have been so bad. But they've made business decisions and tried to pretend they're artistic judgments, and that stinks."

"You never wanted it in the first place, did you?" Lisa said. She could remember Ingram at the time of the negotiations; he'd tried to argue

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nick out of the deal, but it hadn't worked. Nick had kept on looking at the magical figure of one million plus, unable to believe that a kid from nowhere could come to command such a price. And of course, he didn't; there were clauses and sub-clauses and separate arrangements dependent on market performance, each of which took a chunk of the cash away and put it back in the company's hands to be earned all over again. Nick had seen none of this. He'd been unable to take his eyes off that long line of zeros.

Ingram said, "I advised against him signing. Then he signed, and I shut up."

"And that," Lisa said, beginning to perceive that there was rather more going on in Ingram's mind than the despondency he was allowing to show, "was the day you started planning for when everything turned out like it has."

"I took a couple of precautions," Ingram said with airy modesty.

"Like, what?" Patranella said, scenting good news but uncertain of how that could be.

"Like the clause in our contract with the old company that prevents them from releasing any compilation albums without our say-so. Also the fact that there's nothing in the present contract to prevent Nick from making personal appearances with his own early material. We can do a back-door deal with Eagle and stage our own relaunch in around eighteen months. Eagle aren't too thrilled with us for walking out on them, but at least they know what Nick's worth."

There was a silence of realization, all around the lounge. Compilation albums tended to follow when any artist made a major switch of record label. The old company, finding themselves sitting in the dust behind the bandwagon, would hurriedly bring out a "greatest hits" collection as their last chance to cash in. Eagle Records hadn't been able to do this, and even Lisa hadn't been able to understand why; but now she could see the purpose behind Bob Ingram's strategy.

She said, "Well, it'll give Nick something to hang onto," but Ingram looked at her with a warning in his eyes.

"Nick doesn't know what I've got in mind," he said, and he glanced around at all of them. "I don't want him finding out yet, either."

"Are you serious?" Anne Digby said.

"Deadly serious. The one bright spot in all of this is that when Nick's insecure the songs get better, and we're going to need that."

"So in the meantime," Patranella said, "we sit tight and wait it out."

"Yeah," Ingram said. "Nobody's going to starve, but we'll have to get lean. We can't count on royalties, and we can't count on a so-called falling star commanding much of a contract advance until he's proven himself all over again. Which he will."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lisa didn't even think to question Bob Ingram's judgment; he'd steered Nick for too long, and certainly knew him better than anyone else around.

She said, "You've got a lot of faith in him, haven't you?"

"I love the guy. I'd kill for him. And if it ever actually came to that, I'd probably start with Creepo DeSimone. Until *that* opportunity comes around, we'll just have to be satisfied with settling in here and shaving all the extras off our operation. This is where you all come in."

The next hour was spent in a detailed run-through of Ingram's ideas for making savings, with contributions and suggestions from everybody. Lisa made notes under the heading of "getting lean," with the intention of drafting a show-and-destroy set of minutes on the meeting to make sure that proposals didn't get lost in the onward rumble of enthusiasm. She'd done this kind of thing a thousand times before and reckoned that she could handle it in her sleep, which was as well because her full attention wasn't on it now. She was thinking of the Volt and what it represented to her, and she was thinking of how she was soon to be released.

The meeting broke up in time for lunch, with Lisa saying that she'd follow the others through as soon as she'd locked the notes away in her desk drawer. What she actually did was to wait in her office until she'd heard their voices pass on through the hall, and then she slipped out and ran up the wide stairs. A minute later she was descending again with the Volt wrapped in an old silk scarf that had been in the same drawer.

Burn it to stop the process, Louri had advised her; might as well follow form in this, she told herself, and she took the Volt through into the now-empty lounge with its log fire. The hearth was old, ash-stained, and the rug before it was pocked with burns. She took the scarf from the Volt, and looked at it for one last time; just a kid's plastic toy, taped like a mummy and bulging with an obscene pregnancy, its face impassive and its limbs still twisted. She straightened them out, for no particular reason, and then she bent and quickly placed it on the topmost log.

It lay there, neat and rigid, Eagle Eyes staring up into the darkness of the chimney, but it didn't burn. The tape around its middle began to char and to give out thin tendrils of smoke as the adhesive melted, but Lisa realized that she'd made a mistake in placing it too high. It needed to be down in the white-hot center of the fire. She could leave it and go to lunch and it would burn eventually as it lay, but somebody else might see it and—worst of all—might even rescue it. And besides, she wanted to see its end, and to be certain that she'd closed the business that she'd started.

Stupid idea, anyway. She should have had more faith in Bob Ingram, and held onto her savings. She reached for the iron poker that stood

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leaning against the corner of the surround, and used it to try to push the Volt deeper into the flames.

The doll had gone soft, which she hadn't been expecting; it slid from the log almost like a living thing, and when it hit the embers underneath it began to twist and stretch like a body in agony. She knew that it was just the plastic distorting in the heat, but still the sight made her feel faintly sick. There was a highpitched whistling of escaping gases that might almost have been a scream; and as she watched, the Volt's taped middle split as the egg inside exploded and threw out rotten green ropes that were like guts.

She'd seen enough. She took the poker again, and thrust it at the Volt to bury it deeper in the fire where it couldn't be seen. But the doll folded itself around the poker and seemed to cling to it, distorted and disembowelled and melting but still eager to escape. She tried to scrape it off but didn't succeed the first time; the Volt was blackened now, charred like a body from a car wreck, only its eyes still showing white.

She heard them pop, one at a time, and then the Volt finally seemed to release its grip.

Lisa covered it over with ashes, and put a new log on top. Then she held the poker with its tip in another part of the fire to cleanse it, before replacing it by the surround and going through to join the others.

That faint wheeze of escaping gas could still be heard as she walked out of the lounge. But it would soon end, and then it would be over; a piece of the past, the bubble closed.

Bob Ingram was called out at ten o'clock that night, and within a few minutes of his leaving the news was all through the house. It was one in the morning before he got back, but nobody had gone to bed; they all stood in the big entrance hall like chessmen on the black-and-white tiles, and Ingram walked right through without looking at or speaking to anybody. He stalked into the lounge and slammed the door behind him, and that seemed to be that.

They could hardly go crowding in after, but neither could they leave it this way. Somebody was going to have to follow Ingram to find out what had been happening; and most of the others were now looking at Lisa, which meant that she was elected.

She closed the lounge door softly behind her. Ingram was over by the fireplace with a tumbler almost filled with scotch, and he was standing with his elbow on the high mantle and his head resting against his arm. He looked weary, totally spent. It was a few moments before he lifted his red-rimmed eyes to look at Lisa; she saw a kind of welcome there, and so she drew closer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They didn't need me," he said. "Apparently there wasn't even enough of him left to recognize."

"Oh, Bob," she said sadly, and she took his hand. He gripped hers for a moment, and then let go.

"It was DeSimone," he said. "He was responsible for this."

"What do you mean?"

"He was there. He was in the car with Nick. The only bright spot in this whole lousy mess is that he got torched, too. I hope it hurt. I really hope it did."

Lisa was beginning to say that she didn't understand, but then she realized that Ingram was telling her anyway. "It was the Chinese kid all over again," he said. "Remember? Nick's little humiliation trip that we went to so much trouble to cover up? When he drove into town on his own it was because he was meeting DeSimone. That oily little piece of germ warfare was getting *his* kicks out of slapping Nick around inprivate while he messed up the rest of his life in public. And Nick, poor bastard, couldn't get enough of it."

"What exactly happened?"

"They were both in the Porsche, on the motorway. Nick was driving. They came to one of those crossover sections where there were roadworks, and apparently Nick didn't even see the signs. He went straight through the plastic cones and hit a tarmac spreader at sixty. There was no one in the truck. The car blew up, and the tar got so hot it started to burn."

The door to the hallway opened a crack then, and Tony Patranella peeked in; but Lisa quickly waved him away and so he withdrew and closed the door, again without making a sound. Bob Ingram didn't even seem to have noticed; he moved across to the sofa and lowered himself onto it like a man at the end of a thousand-mile walk.

"You know what really gets to me?" he said. "I was the one who invited that shrimp here for the weekend. The two of them were probably in the same bed under this roof and I didn't know a thing about it."

In the same bed, Lisa was thinking; on the same sheets.

She was also thinking of the Volt as it twisted and screamed in the fire, its two eyes exploding like popcorn, one for each life that it carried. But Louri had told her that burning would end it, hadn't he?

And it had, hadn't it?

"Listen," Ingram said, getting up suddenly and leaving his drink untouched on the floor beside the sofa, "I've got calls to make. Tell the others, will you?" And he walked over toward the other door out of the lounge, the old service entrance that would allow him to get around to the phone in his office with less chance of having to face anybody along the way.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As he opened the door, Lisa said, "You want me to tell them everything?"

He considered for a moment. "Don't make Nick look bad," he said. "We owe him that much. Especially since he's going to make us all rich."

"What do you mean?"

"The guy's a dead rock star," Ingram said, letting the weight of the words hit her for the first time. "You know what his back catalogue's suddenly going to be *worth*? This is the gravy train, and DeSimone isn't even around to stop it any more." His voice was flip, but his face was bleak and his voice was coming dangerously close to the edge of cracking. "Solid gold again, Lisa," he said. "Solid gold."

And then he turned and went through, softly closing the door behind him. Lisa was left in an empty room with the fire burning low.

Whoever makes these things happen, he's got a weird sense of humor.

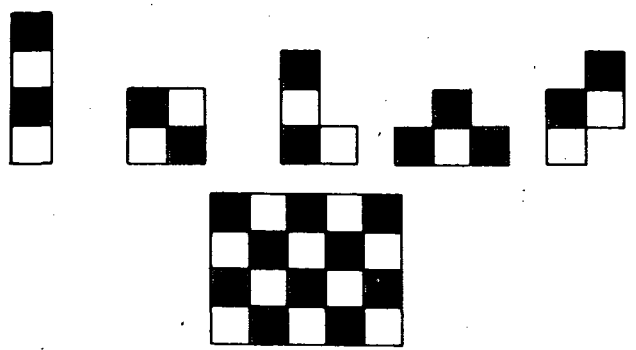
But nobody was laughing.

Not down here, anyway. ●

MARTIN GARDNER (From page 111)

SECOND SOLUTION TO ANIMAL TTT

FIGURE 3



If you checkerboard color each animal as shown in Figure 3 you'll see that each has two black and two white cells except for Knobby, who has three cells of one color and one of the other. Therefore the five pieces cannot tile any figure unless, when it is checkerboard colored, it has an excess of two cells of one color. The 4 x 5 rectangle has an equal number of black and white cells, making it impossible to tile unless you slice Knobby into two parts.

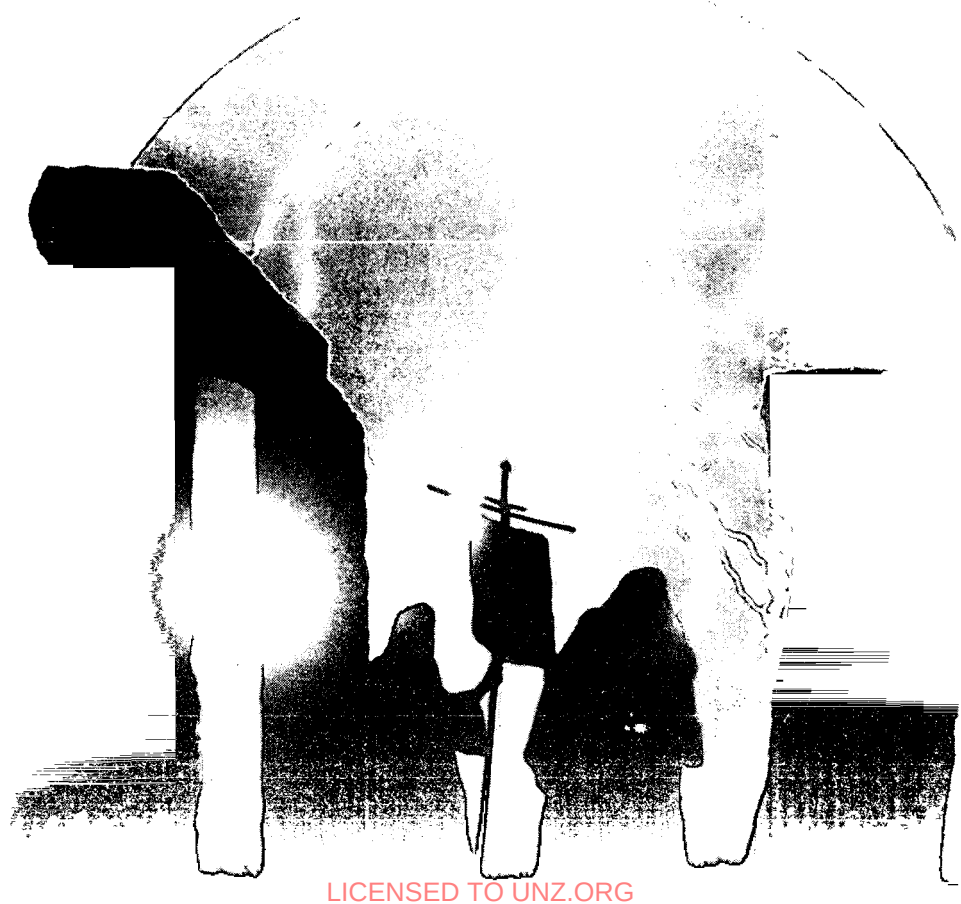
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by James Patrick Kelly

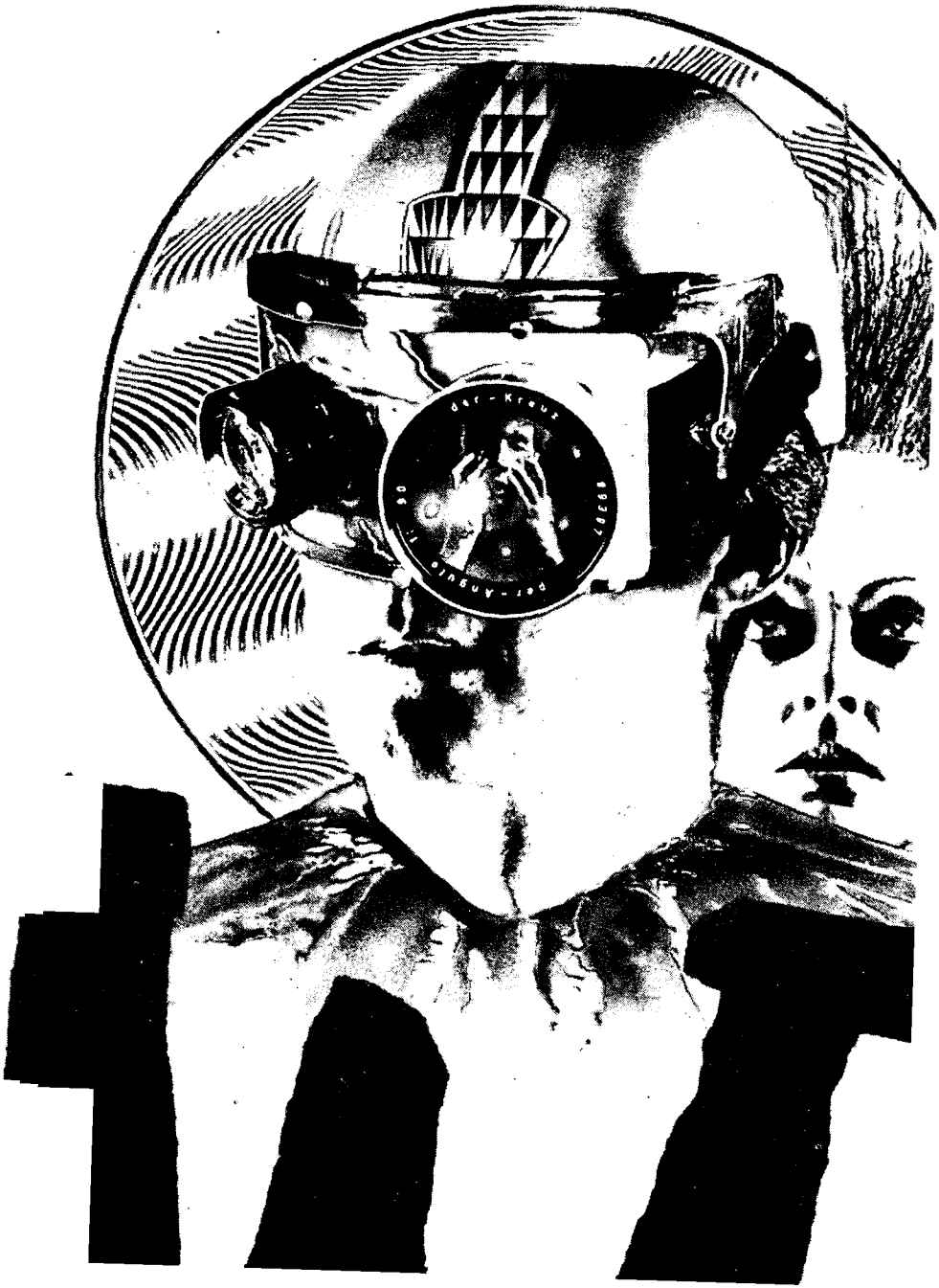
art J K Potter

The author says he was one of the lucky ones who just happened to schedule his stopover at Stonehenge on Solstice day, 1984. The free festival he found there was not very different from its counterpart in "Solstice"

SOLSTICE



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Once a year they open it to the public. Some spend lifetimes planning for the day. Others arrive by chance, fortunate sightseers swarming out of the tour hovers. They record it all but only rarely understand what they are witnessing. Years later a few of the disks will come out to pep up drooping parties. Most will be forgotten.

It happens on the summer solstice. One of two points on the ecliptic at which its distance from the celestial equator is greatest. The longest day of the year. A turning point.

They arrived late in the afternoon when the crowd was starting to thin. A tall man in his early forties. A teenaged girl. They had the same gray eyes. Her straw-colored hair had begun to darken, just as his had darkened when he was seventeen. There was an inescapable similarity in the way they whispered jokes to one another and laughed at the people around them. Neither carried a camera.

They had come to wander among the sarsen stones of what Tony Cage considered the most extraordinary antiquity in the world. Yes, the pyramids were older, bigger, but they had long since yielded their mystery. The Parthenon had once been more beautiful but the acids of history had etched it beyond recognition. But Stonehenge . . . Stonehenge was unique. Essential. It was a mirror in which each age could observe the quality of its imagination, in which every person could measure his or her size.

They joined the queue waiting to enter the dome. Occasional screams of synthesized music pierced the buzz of the crowd; the free festival being held in a nearby field was hitting a frenzied peak. Perhaps later they would explore its delights, but now they had reached the entrance to the exterior shell of the dome. The girl laughed as she popped through the bubble membrane.

"It's like being kissed by a giant," she said.

They were in the space between the exterior and interior shells of the dome. On any other day this would have been as close as they could have come to the stone circles. The dome was made of hardened optical plastic with a low refractive index. Walkways spiraled upward in the space between the shells; tourists who climbed to the top had a bird's-eye view of Stonehenge.

They entered the inner shell. There was a reporter with a microcam standing near the Heel Stone; he spotted them and started waving. "Pardon, sir, pardon!" Cage pulled the girl out of the flow of the crowd and waited; he did not want the fool calling his name in front of all these people.

"You're the drug artist." The reporter drew them aside. A daisy smile bloomed on his obsidian face. "Case, Cane . . ." He tapped the skull plug behind his ear as if to dislodge the memory from his wetware.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Cage."

"And this?" The smile became a smirk. "Your lovely daughter?"

Cage thought about punching the man. He thought about walking away. The girl laughed.

"I'm Wynne." She shook the reporter's hand.

"Name's Zomboy. Wiltshire stringer for SONIC. Have you seen the old stones before? I could show you around." Cage kept expecting the microcam's red light to come on but the reporter seemed strangely hesitant. "I say, you wouldn't by any chance be holding any free samples? For one of your major fans?"

Wynne bit her lip to stifle a giggle and reached into her pocket. "I doubt you could tell Tony much about Stonehenge. Sometimes I think he lives for this place." She produced a plastic bottle, shook some green capsules into her palm and offered them to the reporter.

He took one and inspected it carefully. "No label on the casing." He fixed his suspicion on Cage. "You're sure it's safe?"

"Hell no," said Wynne. She popped two of the capsules into her mouth. "Very experimental. Turn your brains to blood pudding." She offered one to Cage and he took it. He wished Wynne would stop playing these twisted games. "We've been eating them all day," said Wynne. "Can't you tell?"

Gingerly, the reporter put one in his mouth. Then the red light came on. "So you're a devotee of Stonehenge, Mr. Cage?"

"Oh yes." Wynne was babbling. "He comes here all the time. Gives lectures to whoever will listen. Says there's a kind of magic to the place."

"Magic?" The lens stared at Cage, had never left him.

"Not the kind of magic you're thinking of, I'm afraid." Cage hated looking into cameras when he was twisted. "No wizards or human sacrifices or bolts of lightning. A subtle kind of magic, the only kind still possible in this overly explained world." The words rolled out unbidden—perhaps because he had spoken them before. "It has to do with the way a mystery captures the imagination and becomes an obsession. A magic that works exclusively in the mind."

"And who better to contemplate mind magic than the celebrated drug artist, Mr. Tony Cage." The reporter spoke not to them but to an unseen audience.

Cage smiled into the camera.

In 1130 Henry of Huntingdon, an archdeacon at Lincoln, was commissioned by his bishop to write a history of England. His was the first written account of a place called "Stanenges, where stones of wonderful size have been erected after the manner of doorways, so that doorway appears to have been raised upon doorway; and no one can conceive of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

how such great stones have been raised aloft, or why they were built there." The name derives from the Old English, "stan": stone, and "hengen": gallows. Medieval gallows consisted of two posts and a crosspiece. There is no record of executions at Stonehenge, although Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing six years after Henry, describes the massacre of four hundred and sixty British lords by treacherous Saxons. Geoffrey claims that, as a memorial to the dead, Uther Pendragon and Merlin stole the sacred megaliths known as the Giants' Dance from the Irish by magic and force of arms and re-erected them on the Wiltshire Plain. The "Merlin theory" of Stonehenge's construction, while certainly true to the spirit of Anglo-Irish relations, was of a piece with the rest of Geoffrey's Arthurian tapestry: a jingoistic fairy tale.

"Wake up."

Cage had been dreaming of sheep. A vast treeless pasture, green waves rolling to the horizon. The animals shied away from him as he wandered among them. He was lost.

"Tony."

The cryogenicists claimed that stiffs did not dream. Strictly speaking they were right, but as the tank thawed him out, his synapses begin to fire again. Then dreams came.

"Wake up, Tony."

His eyelids flickered. "Go 'way." He felt like a pincushion. He opened his eyes and stared at her. For a moment he thought he was still dreaming. Wynne had shaved her hair off except for a spiky multicolored fan that ran from ear to ear. From the looks of it she had just had a new body tint done. In blue.

"I'm leaving, Tony. I only stayed around to make sure you thawed all right. I'm all packed."

He mumbled something sarcastic. It did not make much sense, even to him, but the tone of voice was right. He knew she was not as strong as she thought she was. Otherwise she wouldn't have tried to spring this on him while he was still groggy. He sat up in the tank.

"Leave, then," he said. "Help me out of here."

He huddled on the couch in the drawing room and tried not to feel cold as he stared at the mist which hung over Galway Bay. There was no horizon; both the sky and the water were the color of old thatch. Exactly the same kind of day it had been when he had climbed into the tank. He had never much liked Ireland. But when the Republic had extended its tax benefits to drug artists, his accountants had forced citizenship on him.

Wynne had a fire going; the room had filled with the bitter smell of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

burning peat. She brought him a cup of coffee. There was a red and green pill on the saucer. "What's this?" He held it up.

"New. Serentol. Helps you relax."

"I've been stiff for six months, Wynne. I'm plenty relaxed."

She shrugged, took the pill from him and popped it into her mouth. "No sense wasting it."

"Where will you go?" he said.

She seemed surprised that he would ask, as if she had expected an argument first. "England for a while," she said. "After that I don't know."

"All right." He nodded. "No sense staying here any longer than you have to. But you will come back when it's tank time again?"

She shook her head; the peacock hair fluttered. He decided that he could get used to it.

"How much will it cost to change your mind?"

She smiled. "You haven't got enough."

He matched the smile. "Come give us a kiss then." He pulled her down onto his lap. She was twenty-two years old and very beautiful. He knew it was immodest of him to think this because when he looked at her he saw himself. The best thing about these revivals was watching her catch up in age as he hibernated the winters away to establish residency for tax purposes. In another thirty-odd years they would both be in their fifties. "I love you," he said.

"Sure." Her voice was slurred. "Daddy loves his little girl."

Cage was shocked. He had never heard her talk that way before. Something had happened while he was in the tank. But then she giggled and put her hand on his thigh. "You can come with us, if you want."

"Us?" He brushed his fingertips across the smooth scalp and wondered how many serentols she had taken that day.

James I was fascinated by Stonehenge, so much so that he commissioned the celebrated architect Inigo Jones to draw a plan of the stones and determine their purpose. The results of Jones' studies were published posthumously in 1655 by his son-in-law. Jones rejected the notion that such a structure could have been raised by any indigenous people since "the ancient *Britains* (were) utterly ignorant, as a Nation wholly addicted to Wars, never applying themselves to the Study of Arts, or troubling their thoughts with any Excellency." Instead Jones, who had learned his art in Renaissance Italy and was a student of classical architecture, declared that Stonehenge must be a Roman temple, a blending of the Tuscan and Corinthian styles, possibly built during the reign of the Flavian emperors.

In 1663 Dr. Walter Charlton, a physician to Charles II, disputed Jones' theory, maintaining that Stonehenge was built by the Danes "to be a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Court Royal, or a place for the Election and Inauguration of their Kings." The poet Dryden applauded Charlton in verse,

"Stone-heng, once thought a *Temple*, you have found
A *Throne*, where Kings, our Earthly Gods, were crown'd"

In fact, many pointed to the crown-like shape of Stonehenge as proof of this theory. Of course these speculations, coming so soon after Charles had been restored to the throne following a long exile, were politically convenient. The most astute courtiers spared no effort to discredit Cromwell's republic and to curry royal favor by reasserting the antiquity of the divine right of kings.

Wynne had been Cage's greatest extravagance. He had never really sought the money; the entertainment multinationals kept forcing it on him. Once he had acquired a Raphael and a Constable and a Klee, vacationed in the Mindanao Trench and on Habitat Three and at the disney on the moon, he found precious little else worth the trouble of buying.

People envied him: the rich, the *famous* drug artist. But when Cage first hit it at Western Amusement, he had almost suffocated in his new wealth. The problem was that the money would not just sit there and keep quiet. It screamed for attention. It had to be collected, managed and disbursed by an endless procession of people with tight smiles and firm handshakes who insisted on giving him advice no matter how much he paid them to leave him alone. To them he was Tony Cage, Incorporated.

It was while he was developing Focus that Cage decided he needed someone to help him spend the money. He felt no particular urge to contract a marriage. None of the women he was sleeping with at the time mattered to him. He knew that they had been drawn by that irresistible pheromone: the smell of success. He wanted to share his life with someone who would be bound to him by ties no lawyer could break. Someone who would be uniquely his. Forever. Or so he imagined. Perhaps there was nothing romantic about it at all. Maybe the sociobiologists were right and what was at work was an instinct that had been wired into the brains of vertebrates back in the Devonian: reproduce, *reproduce*.

Wynne was carried in an artificial womb. It was cleaner that way, medically and legally. All it took was a tissue culture from a few of Cage's intestinal epithelial cells and some gene sculpturing to change the "Y" chromosome to an "X," as well as a few other miscellaneous improvements. Just this and a little matter of one-point-two-million new dollars and Wynne was his.

He told himself that he must reject all the labels that they tried to put on Wynne. He refused to think of her as his daughter. Nor was she exactly his clone. She was like a twin, except that they were carried to term in different wombs and her birth came some twenty-six years after

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his and the abusive environment that twisted him never touched her. Which was to say she was nothing like a twin. She was something new, something infinitely precious. There were no rules for her behavior, no boundaries for her abilities. He liked to brag that he had got exactly what he had ordered. "She's prettier than me, smarter, a better tennis player," he would joke, "worth every cent."

Cage did not have much time for Wynne when she was a toddler. Back in those days he was still testing the product on himself and often as not would stagger home quite twisted. He found her an English nanny—the best kind. He did not pay Mrs. Detling to love the little girl; Wynne earned that on her own. The fierce old woman spent truckloads of Cage's money on Wynne; their philosophy was to treat the girl as if she were a blank disk on which must be recorded only the most important information. For Wynne's sake they traveled whenever Cage could get away from the lab. Detling helped her develop an Old World command of languages; Wynne spoke English, Russian, Spanish, a smattering of Japanese, and she could read her Virgil in Latin. When she entered third form she tested in the ninety-ninth percentile for her age group on the Geneva Culture-Free Intelligence Profile.

It was not until she was seven that Cage began to take real pleasure in her company. Her charm was an incongruous mix of maturity and childishness.

He came home from the lab one day to find Wynne networking a game on the telelink.

"I thought you were going to see your friend. What's her name?" he said.

"Haidee? I decided not to when Nanny told me you were coming home early."

"I just came home to change." At the time he was working on Laughers and still had a buzz from a morning dose. He did not want to start giggling like a fool in front of the child so he opened the bar and poked a pressure syringe filled with neuroleptic to straighten himself out. "I have a date. Have to go out at six."

She signed off from the game. "With that new one? Jocelyn?"

"Jocelyn, yes." He held out his hand for the telelink controller. "Mind if I check the mail?"

She gave it to him. "I miss you when you're at work, Tony."

He had heard this before. "I miss you too, Wynne." He brought up the mail menu on the screen and began the sort.

She snuggled next to him and watched in silence. "Tony," she said at last, "do grownups ever cry?"

"Hmmm." Western was bitching about the delays with Laughers, threatened to hold up the bonus from Soar. "Sometimes, I guess."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They do?" She sounded shocked. "If they fall down and scrape their knees?"

"Usually it's because something sad happens."

"Like what?"

"Something sad." Long silence. "You know." He wanted her to change the subject.

"I saw Jocelyn crying."

She had his attention.

"The other night," Wynne said. "She came and sat on the couch, waiting for you. I was playing house behind the chair. She didn't know I was here. She's ugly, you know, when she cries. The stuff under her eyes makes her tears black. Then she got up and she was going toward the bathroom and she saw me and she looked at me like it was my fault she was crying. But she kept going and didn't say anything. When she came out, she was happy again. At least she wasn't crying. Did you make her sad?"

"I don't know, Wynne." He felt as though he should be angry but he did not know at whom. "Maybe I did."

"Well, I don't think that was a very grownup thing to do. I don't think I like her much." Wynne looked at him then to see if she had gone too far. "Well, what does she have to be sad about? She sees you more than I do and I don't cry."

He hugged her. "You're a good girl, Wynne." He decided then not to see Jocelyn that night. "I love you."

Many people try to make a division between personal life and life at work. Before Wynne, Cage had always been lonely, no matter whom he was with. He hated facing the void at the center of his personal life; throwaway women like Jocelyn only fed the emptiness. He went to work to escape himself; this was the secret of his success. But as Wynne grew older he had to change, gradually making room for her in his life until she filled it.

William Stukeley belonged to the grand tradition of English eccentrics. From 1719 to 1724 this impressionable young antiquarian spent his summers exploring Stonehenge. His meticulous fieldwork was not to be equaled for a century and a half. Stukeley made precise measurements of the relationships between the stones. He explored the surrounding countryside and discovered that the circle was but a part of a much larger neolithic complex. He was the first to point out the orientation of Stonehenge's axis toward the summer solstice. He did not, however, publish these findings until ten years later. In the interim he married, moved from London to the country, took holy orders—and decided that he was a Druid.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From his quirky reading of the Bible, Pliny, and Tacitus, Stukeley had deduced that the Druids must be direct descendants of the Biblical Abraham, who had hitched a ride to England on Phoenician ships. Although his book contained an account of the superb fieldwork at Stonehenge, Stukeley's polemical intent was best summed up in the frontispiece, a portrait of the author as Chyndonax, a prince of the Druids. It was "a chronological history of the origin and progress of true religion, and of idolatry." Stukeley painted a vision of noble sages practicing a pure natural religion, the modern equivalent of which, he was at pains to point out, was none other than his own beloved Church of England! The Druids had built Stonehenge as a temple to their serpent god. Although Stukeley believed that the rites practiced there may have included human sacrifice, he was inclined to forgive his spiritual forebears their excesses. Perhaps they had got Abraham's example wrong.

A hundred years later Stukeley's Druidical fantasy had wormed its way both into the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the popular imagination. In 1857 a direct rail link between London and Salisbury was established and the Victorians descended in droves. To some Stonehenge was splendid confirmation of the ancient and present greatness of Britannia, to others it was a dark dream of disemboweled maidens and pagan license. It was about this time that the summer solstice became a spectacle. The pubs in nearby Amesbury stayed open all night, although by license only tourists were to be served. If the skies were clear those who staggered on to Stonehenge might number in the thousands. It was not a respectful crowd. They would break bottles against the bluestones and climb the sarsens, dancing in the midsummer dawn. The dreaming stillness of the Wiltshire plain would be shattered by rowdy laughter and the clatter of vehicles.

Cage never liked Tod Schluermann. He told himself the fact that Tod had become Wynne's lover while Cage was in the tank had nothing to do with it. Nor did it matter that Tod had convinced her to go with him to England. Tod had bounced around the world in his twenty-four years; his father had been an Air Force doctor. Born in the Philippines, he had grown up on bases in Germany, Florida, and Colorado. He had flunked out of the Air Force Academy and had attended several other colleges without acquiring anything more substantial than distaste for getting up early.

Tod was a skinny kid who looked good in the gaudy skintights that had come into fashion. He was handsome in a streamlined way. Beneath his face was the delicate bone structure of a Renaissance madonna. In order to get into the Academy he had needed cochlear implants to correct a slight hearing problem; he had ordered the surgeons to clip his ears.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He had no hair on him at all except for a black brush on his head. Like Wynne he had a pale blue skin tint; in some lights he looked like a corpse.

He and Wynne had met at a drug club; she was doing Soar at a light table when he sat down next to her. Cage never understood exactly what Tod was doing at the club. Tod did not often use psychoactive drugs and, although he tried to hide it, seemed to disapprove of regular users. A good candidate for the Drug Temperance League. There was a streak of the puritan in him that distanced him from his licentious generation. In his years in and out of college, Tod had read widely but not well. Like many self-taught men, he suspected expertise. He had native intelligence, that was clear, but arrogance often made him seem stupid.

"And where are you two going to get the money to live?" Cage asked him over dinner the night before they left Ireland.

Tod swirled a premier cru Chablis in a Waterford crystal wineglass and smiled. "Money is only a problem if you think too much about it, man."

"Tony, would you stop worrying and pass the veal?" Wynne said. "We'll be fine." No one spoke as Tod helped himself to seconds and passed her the serving dish. "After all," she continued, "we'll have my allowance."

There was a spot of Madeira sauce on Tod's chin. "I don't want your money, Wynne."

Cage knew that was for his benefit. Wynne's allowance was generous enough to support a barrister in Mayfair; he didn't want her wasting it on Tod. "What makes you think you can learn to program a video synthesizer? People go to school for that, you know."

"School, yes." He and Wynne exchanged glances. "Well, you know, the problem is that by the time the teachers get done with you, they've mashed your creativity flat. Talk to the good little 'A' students who catch on with the big companies and you find that they've forgotten why they became artists in the first place. All they know how to do is recycle the stale old crap they learned at school. Anyone can see it. Just call up some videos on the telelink. Yesterday's news, man."

"Tod's been studying very hard. And he's had some experience already," said Wynne. "Besides, it isn't as hard to learn to program as it used to be. They've really been working to make the interface a lot more accessible."

"They? You mean the stale old corporate grinds?"

"Tony." Wynne pushed away from the table.

"No," said Tod. "He's right." She settled down again. Cage hated the way she always gave in to Tod. "Look, man, I'm not saying that everything you learn in school is corrupt. Look at you. I mean, you could never have developed Soar or anything if you hadn't done your time. I give you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a lot of credit for coming out of that whole. Your work is brilliant. I know artists who can't even think about a project until they poke a few ml's of your Focus. But that's what it's about, man. What's important is the art, not the technology."

"We're talking about computer-driven video synthesizers, Tod." Cage laid his fork across the plate. The conversation had killed his appetite. "I happen to know a little something about them. I've had programmers working for me, remember. They're complicated machines. And expensive to use. How are you going to afford the access time you'll need?"

Tod was the only one still eating. "There are ways," he said between bites. "The small shops are open to hackers after business hours. Go in at three in the morning and work until five. Cheap."

"Even if you come up with anything worthwhile, you have to get it distributed. The multinationals like Western Amusement won't even touch freelance."

Tod shrugged. "So? I'll start at the bottom. That's why we're going to England. British telelink has plenty of open slots on community access stations. Once people see what I've got, it'll be easy. I know it."

Wynne poured a volatile stimulant called Bliss into a brandy snifter, breathed deeply of the fumes, and passed it. Tod's sniff was quick and disapproving; he offered the glass to Cage. Colleen came in with the dessert and Cage realized that there was nothing he could say. It was obvious that Tod did not have the resiliency to fight through the inevitable setbacks. In six months it would be another scheme. Tod would blame Wynne or Cage—someone else!—for his failure and continue his aimless life without them, secure in the delusion that he was a genius trapped in a world full of fools. It was obvious.

But there was Wynne, his beautiful Wynne, beaming at Tod as if he were the second coming of Leonardo. The son of a bitch was going to take her away.

Sir Edmund Antrobus, the baronet who owned Stonehenge, died without an heir in 1915. For years he had squabbled with the Church of the Universal Bond, a modern reincarnation of Druidism based on equal parts of wish fulfillment and bad scholarship, over access to the site. The Chief Druid announced that it had been a Druid curse which had struck Sir Edmund down. Several months later his estate came up for sale. Mr. Cecil Chubb bought Stonehenge at auction for 6600 pounds. He claimed it was an impulse purchase. Three years later Chubb offered Stonehenge to the nation and was knighted by Lloyd George for his generosity.

To the cautious bureaucrats in the Office of Works, Stonehenge was a disaster waiting to happen. Several leaning stones threatened to collapse; wobbly lintels needed readjustment. The government sought help

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from the Society of Antiquaries for this work. The antiquarians seized the opportunity to expand the repairs into a grandiose, and disastrous, excavation of the entire monument. The government, however, withdrew funding soon after the stones were straightened and for years the Society struggled to finance the dig itself. More often than not Colonel William Hawley had to work alone, living in a drafty hut on the site. In 1926 the project was mercifully suspended, having accomplished little more than disturb evidence and embarrass the Society. As the bewildered Hawley told the *Times*: "The more we dig, the more the mystery appears to deepen."

Like many people, Cage did not chose his career; he became a drug artist by accident. When he started at Cornell he intended to study genetic engineering. At that time Boggs was developing viruses that could alter chromosomes in existing cells. Kwabena had published her pioneering work reconstructing algae for human consumption. It seemed as if every month a different geneticist stepped forward to promise a miracle that would change the world. Cage wanted to make miracles, too. At the time, idealism did not seem so foolish.

Unfortunately genetic engineering excited every other bright kid in the country. The competition at Cornell was fierce. Cage started doing drugs in his sophomore year just to keep up with the course work. Soon he was the king of the all-nighters. He started with small doses of metrazine; it was only supposed to be psychologically addicting. Cage knew he was tougher than any drug. He did not much care for the recreational stuff back then. No time. He tried THC on occasion: both pot and the new aerosols from Sweden. Once over a spring break a woman he had been seeing gave him some mescal buttons. She said it would give him new insight. It did—he realized he was wasting his time with her.

Three semesters later it all went wrong. By then he was poking megamphetamines in massive doses, sometimes over eighty milligrams. The initial rush felt like a whole-body orgasm; he did not feel like studying much afterward. His adviser told him to switch out of the program after he took a "C" in genetic chemistry. He was burning up brain cells and losing weight; he had already lost his direction. He knew he had to get clean and start over again.

He had signed up for a course in psychopharmacology on a paranoid whim. If he had to study something, why not the chemistry of what he was doing to himself with his habit? Bobby Belotti was a good teacher; he soon became a friend. He helped Cage get off the megs, helped him salvage a plain vanilla degree in biology and encouraged him to apply to graduate school. Much of Cage's idealism had been seared away during those twisted semesters of amphetamine psychosis. Maybe that was why

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it was so easy to convince himself that developing new drugs was just as noble as curing hemophilia.

Cage wrote his master's thesis on the effects of indole hallucinogens on serontonergic and dopaminergic receptors. The early indole hallucinogens like LSD and DMT had long since been thought to inhibit production of the neuroregulator serotonin, not surprising since their chemical structures were remarkably similar. His work showed that hallucinogens of this family also affect the dopamine-producing system and that many of the reported effects of these drugs resulted from interactions between these neuroregulators. It was not, he had to admit, particularly innovative or brilliant work; the foundations had been laid long ago. But by then he had grown tremendously bored with being a student. The work reflected it.

He took his degree in the middle of the brief, inglorious rule of the America First Party, a pack of libertarian fanatics bent on dismantling the government of the United States. Sunsetting the Food and Drug Administration sparked the revolution in recreational drug use. Cage was still debating whether to slog on for his doctorate when Bobby Belotti called to say that he was leaving Cornell. Western Amusement was recuiting people to do R&D for its new psychoactive drug division. Belotti was going. Did Cage want in? Of course.

Belotti's team was supposed to be looking for a businessman's flash. Something fast and dirty: fat-soluble so that it could pass quickly into the brain and reach its site of action within minutes after ingestion. It had to be easily metabolized so that the psychoactive effect would fade within an hour or two. No needles, keep the tolerance effect low. They did not want the users to see God or experience the ultimate orgasm, just a little psychic distortion, some pretty visuals, and leave them with a smile.

Since Cage had already worked with the indole hallucinogens, Belotti gave him pretty much of a free hand. After a couple of frustrating months, he began to look seriously at DMD. It seemed to fit the specifications, except that animal tests did not show significant psychoactive effect. He worried that it might be too subtle. No matter how safe it was, the stuff was no good if it left the user straight as a Baptist accountant. Still Cage was able to convince Belotti to authorize microiontophoretic tests on rats.

Bobby Belotti was a thoroughly disheveled man. His curly black hair resisted combing. He was forever tucking in his shirt; his paunch tugged it out again. There were rings of dried coffee on the upper strata of memos and reports piled on his desk; dust gathered undisturbed in the nooks of his terminal. For all his ability, he was the kind of employee that management preferred to hide from the outside world.

"Look at this." Cage burst into Belotti's office and dropped a ten cen-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

timeter stack of fanfold paper on his desk. "The DMD results. The stuff inhibits the hell out of the serotonergic system."

Belotti pulled off his glasses and rubbed his eye with the back of his hand. "Great. Have you got an effect to show me?"

"No, but these numbers say there has to be one. Must be some kind of trigger."

Belotti sighed and began to shuffle through the papers on his desk. "The front office is screaming for something to sell, Tony. I don't see that DMD is the answer. Do you?"

"A couple of weeks, Bobby. I'm almost there—I can taste it."

Belotti found a memo, handed it to Cage. "Give it a rest, Tony. Let's get a couple of products under our belt, then maybe you can try again." The memo reassigned Cage to work directly under Belotti's supervision.

They argued. Cage had never learned to argue and he had a hair-trigger temper. Belotti was too calm, too damn understanding. Although it was never mentioned, the debt that Cage owed Belotti only fueled his outrage. He felt as if he were the wayward student being corrected once again by his kindly professor.

Fuming, Cage brought the odious memo back to his cubicle, shut down his terminal and glared at the empty screen. He was in a mood to lash out, do something crazy. The idea came to him in anger, a stunt straight right out of a mad scientist video. He requisitioned ten milligrams of DMD and went home to try it on himself.

Half an hour after eating the drug, he was lying on the bed in a darkened room, waiting for something, anything to happen. He felt jittery, as if he had just poked some mild speed. His pulse rate was up, he was sweating. He knew from the tests that the drug must have already found its way to his brain. He felt nothing—he was not even angry anymore. At last he got out of bed, turned up the lights and went into the kitchen to make himself a snack. He settled in front of the telelink with a ham and cheese sandwich and turned the monitor on. News. Change channel. Click, click.

No signal. Just visual static. Exactly what it took to trigger DMD's psychoactive effect. He never ate that sandwich.

Instead he spent the next hour gazing intently at a screen of red, green, and blue phosphors flashing at random. Except that to Cage they were not at all random. He saw patterns, wonderful patterns: wheels of fire, amber waves of grain, angels dancing on the head of a pin, demon faces. He felt as if he himself were a pattern. He was liberated from his body, soaring into the screen to play amidst the beautiful lights.

And then it was over, a very clean finish. It had been an hour and a half since he had eaten the pill; the peak had lasted about forty-five minutes. It was perfect. With a sophisticated light show to trigger DMD's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

effect, it might be the most popular drug since alcohol. And it was his, he realized. All his.

After all, Belotti had cut himself out of the action with his memo. It was Cage who had taken the risk, put his body and sanity on the line. Friendship was friendship but Cage knew that if he played this right he could change his life. So he made sure that management heard about DMD from him, making the case that Belotti had tried to stifle important research. If his co-workers resented him for stepping on a friend's face on his scramble up the ladder, Cage learned not to care. The front office was secretly relieved; Cage was much more presentable than Belotti. Soon he was in charge of the team, then the whole lab.

Cage expected Bobby Belotti to leave, go back to Cornell, but he never did. Perhaps Belotti intended it as a subtle kind of revenge: showing up for work every day, drinking coffee with the man who had betrayed him. Cage refused to be shamed. He found ways to avoid Belotti, eventually burying him on a minor project that had little chance of success. The two never spoke much after that.

They called the drug Soar and proceeded to market the hell out of it. Western Amusement's PR flacks made Cage famous before he understood quite what they were doing to him. The interviewers on telelink could not get enough of him. A sanitized bio appeared on most of the major information utilities: the brilliant young researcher, the daring breakthrough, the first step of an incredible psychic journey—at first Cage was amused by it all.

When he could get to the lab he spent much of his time brainstorming mechanisms to trigger Soar's psychoactive effect. The light table, which can read EEG patterns and transform them into hi-res computer pyrotechnics, was the most successful but there were others. In fact, the hardware aftermarket made Western Amusement almost as much as the drug itself. Cage's lab turned into a money machine. To keep the corporate headhunters from stealing him away, Western Amusement gave him participation in the profits. He was soon one of the richest young men in the world.

There were three parts to the recreational drug experience: the chemical itself, the mental state of the user and the environment in which the drug was consumed. What Cage liked to call the surround. As the years passed he became much less involved in developing chemicals. The kids coming out of grad school were better researchers than he had ever been. He was more interested in conceptual design and especially liked dreaming up new surrounds: the sensory deprivation helmet, the alpha strobe. The flacks made the best of his evolving interests; he was no longer a psychopharmacological researcher. He was anointed as the first drug artist.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

However, the real reason Cage was forced to cut back on his involvement with drug development had nothing to do with artistic yearning. He had the classic addictive personality; he really loved to get twisted. Over the years he had let some vicious psychoactive chemicals sink claws into his synapses. Although he always managed to pull free, management was nervous. They had made Tony Cage a corporate symbol; they could not afford a meltdown.

Cage should not have been surprised to see his taste for drugs mirrored in Wynne. She began using when she was nine. By the time she was eleven he was letting her poke some of the major psychoactives. It could hardly have been otherwise if Wynne was to share his life. One of Cage's perks was a personal bar that put most drug clubs to shame. And his own lab was developing a cannabinol chewing gum aimed at the preteen market. Despite what the Temperance League preached, Cage had not made the drug culture; it had made him. Kids all over the world were getting twisted, reaching for the brightest flash. Still, Wynne's zest for drugs disturbed him.

Cage tried to ensure that Wynne was never addicted to any one chemical. He saw to it that her habit was various. If she started to build up a cross-tolerance to hallucinogens, for example, he would make her give the whole family a vacation and switch to opiates. Nor was she constantly twisted. She would go on sprees that would last anywhere from a few hours to a few days. Then nothing for a week or two. Still, Cage worried about her. She took some astounding doses.

The summer before she met Tod they flew from the States into da Vinci airport and checked into the Hilton. Even though they had taken the sub-orbital they were having a hard time getting their biological clocks reset. Since Cage had business in Rome the next day he could not afford to stay jet-lagged. Wynne called room service and had them bring up a couple of strawberry placidex shakes. Cage settled back on his bed; the stuff made him feel as if he were melting into the mattress. Wynne sat in a thermal chair and listlessly switched channels on the telelink. Finally she shut it off and asked him if he thought he took too many drugs.

Cage had been about to doze off; suddenly he was alert as anyone with placidex seeping into his brain can be. "Sure, I think about it all the time. Right now I think I'm okay. There have been times, though, when I thought that I might be in trouble."

She nodded. "How do you know when you're in trouble?"

"One sign is when you stop worrying about it."

She folded her arms as if she were chilled. "That's a hell of a thing to say. You're only safe if you're worried?"

"Or if you're clean."

"Oh, come on. What's the longest you've been clean? *Recently*."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Six months. When I was in the tank." They both laughed. "Since you brought it up," he said, "let me ask you. Think you do too much?"

She considered, as if the question had surprised her. "Nah," she said at last. "I'm young. I can take it."

He told her then about how he had been hooked on amphetamines at Cornell. The story did not seem to impress her.

"But you beat it, obviously," she said. "So it couldn't have been that bad."

"Maybe you're right," he agreed. "But it seems to me that I was lucky. A couple more months and I might never have been able to get clean again."

"I like getting twisted," she said. "But there are other things I like just as much."

"For instance?"

"Sex, as if you didn't know." She stretched. "Space, weightlessness. Losing myself in a book or a play or a video. Spending your money." She yawned. The words were coming slower and slower. "Falling asleep."

"Come to bed, then," he said. "You're keeping both of us up."

She touched the shoulder clasp and her wrapper uncoiled, crinkling, into a pile on the floor. She climbed in next to him. Her skin was cool to the touch. "Who invented placidex anyway?" she said as she snuggled next to him. He could feel the smoothness of her belly against his back. "Man knew what he was doing."

"The man did *not* know what he was doing." It was the placidex that laughed; Cage would rather have made the point. Still, it was funny in a macabre way. "Took a big dose one day, fell asleep in a thermal chair. He had overridden the timer. Baked to death."

"Died happy, anyway." She patted his hip and rolled over. "Pleasant dreams."

In 1965 the astronomer Gerald Hawkins published a book with an immodestly bold title: *Stonehenge Decoded*. Earlier explainers had always looked beyond Stonehenge for evidence to back up their theories. Some ages found authority in the Bible and church tradition, others in the ruins of Rome or the great historians of antiquity. Like his predecessors, Hawkins invoked the authorities of his time to support his ingenious theory. Using the Harvard-Smithsonian IBM 7090 computer to analyze patterns of solar and lunar alignments at Stonehenge, Hawkins reached a conclusion that electrified the world. Stonehenge had been built as an observatory for ancient astronomers. In fact, he claimed that parts of it formed a "Neolithic computer" which had been used by its builders to predict eclipses of the moon.

Hawkins' theory caught the popular imagination, in large part due to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

uncomprehending coverage by the old printed newspapers. Reporters dithered over this marvel: Stone Age scientists had built a computer of sarsen and bluestone that only a modern electronic brain could "decode." There was even a television special on some of the old pre-telelink networks. Much was made of Hawkins' use of the computer despite the fact that the numbers it had crunched could easily have been done by hand. And what Hawkins had, in fact, proved was entirely different from what he claimed to have proved. The computer studies showed that the Aubrey holes, a ring of fifty-six regularly spaced pits, could be used to predict eclipses. They did not show that the builders of Stonehenge had had any such purpose in mind. Others soon offered conflicting interpretations and closely-reasoned Stonehenge astronomies proliferated. The problem was soon recognized: Stonehenge had too much astronomical significance. It was a mirror in which any theoretician could see his ideas reflected.

Cage did not immediately follow Tod and Wynne to England. Instead he flew back to the States to check with Western Amusement after his cryogenic vacation. Cage was no longer an actual employee of the company. An independent contractor, he was himself a corporation. Still, there were no doors shut to him at the lab he had made famous, no secrets that he could not learn. The hot news was that in the six months Cage had been in the tank, Bobby Belotti had made a breakthrough on the Share project.

Cage had started the Share project years before when he was still working at the lab full time. He had been thinking about the way social reinforcement seemed to energize recreational drug use. Most users preferred to get twisted with other users, at drug clubs and private parties or before making love or eating a fine meal or free-fall dancing in space. If socialization enhanced pleasure, why not try to find a way for users to share an identical experience? Not just by creating identical surrounds but by synchronizing the effect on a synaptic level. Direct stimulation of the sensory cortex. A kind of artificial telepathy.

Corporate headquarters was skeptical. The mere mention of telepathy gave the whole project the smell of pseudoscience. And it seemed expensive. At the time Cage had thought that the effect would have to be created electro-chemically; the interaction of psychoactive drugs with electronic brain stimulation. Some kind of wetware would probably be necessary. But marketing research showed that many people were afraid of skull plugs. The zombie factor, they called it.

Cage kept after them. If nothing else, he thought Share might be a powerful aphrodisiac. It could redefine intimacy. What did it matter how expensive it was, if it turned out to be the ultimate erotic experience?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He pointed out that no one had ever gone broke selling love potions, and they let him do a feasibility study.

He had to doctor the study; there were a lot of holes that only basic research could fill. But the research was being done, if not at Western Amusement then elsewhere. What he was finally able to sell them was a small ongoing effort. The perfect place to bury Bobby Belotti. A side bet on a long shot.

And now, years later, Belotti had a something which looked very promising. He had borrowed a drug, 7,2-DAPA, which had been developed by neuropathologists studying language disorders. It could induce an euphoric anomia, disrupting the process of associating certain visual inputs with words. Users had trouble naming what they saw. Nouns, especially abstract nouns and proper names, were especially difficult. The severity of the anomia was related not only to dosage but to the complexity of the visual environment. For example, a user shown a single long-stemmed rose might be unable to speak the words "flower" or "rose" even though he could otherwise carry on intelligent conversation about gardening; show him into a greenhouse and he might well be speechless. However, if he picked the rose up, or smelled it or heard the word "rose," he would make the connection. And in that moment of recognition enkephalin neurons would start pumping like crazy; the brain would be awash in the pleasure of discovery.

"The problem is," Belotti explained to Cage, "there's no way yet to predict exactly which words will be lost. Too much individual variation. For instance, maybe I can't say "rose" but you can. In that case I can get a flash from you; you get nothing. It's only if both of us lose the same word and then get an appropriate cue that we share the effect."

"Doesn't sound as if it's going to replace sex." Cage laughed; Belotti winced. The man had not changed. What was left of his hair still needed combing. There were webs of broken veins beneath his wrinkled skin. He seemed very old, very empty. Cage found it hard to remember the time when they had been friends.

"Well, Shared sex might be interesting." Belotti sounded as if he were repeating excuses he had made before. "But you wouldn't get much effect by telling someone he's having an orgasm. Too tactile, very little to do with visual input. Still, since the enkephalin suppresses pain impulses, pleasure would be correspondingly enhanced. But remember, this is fairly mild at the dosages we're looking at. Take too much and there's a tendency to withdraw. You get into hallucinations. It's unpredictable —dangerous."

"Can the effect be blocked?"

"So far the neuroleptics are the only true antagonists we've found. And they're pretty slow-acting." Belotti shrugged. "Testing isn't finished yet.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Actually I haven't paid that much attention. They took me off it, you know. I spent ten years chasing the specs you wrote and now I'm running computer simulations—make work."

Cage had not thought about Bobby Belotti in a long time; suddenly he was sorry for the old man. "What would you use it for, Bobby?"

"As I said, not my decision. Marketing will find someone to peddle it to, I'm sure. I guess they're a little disappointed that it didn't turn out to be the aphrodisiac you promised them."

"It's fine work, Bobby. You don't have to apologize to anyone. But I can't believe that you've worked as hard and as long as you have without thinking of commercial applications."

"Well if you could control which words were lost, then you could use guides to supply the necessary cues." Belotti scratched the back of his neck. "Maybe you could blend in an hypnotic to give the guides more psychological authority. It might help, say, in art appreciation classes. Or maybe museums could sell it along with those tape recorded tours."

Wonderful. A flash for museums. Cage could imagine the ads. The topless vidqueen says to her silver boyfriend, *Hey, bucko, let's shank down to the National Gallery and get twisted!* No wonder they had taken it away from him. "Why bother? Sounds like all you need are two people sitting at a kitchen table shooting words at each other."

"But words—it's not that simple. We're not talking fancy lights here; we're talking about internalized symbols which can trigger complex mental states. Emotions, memories . . ."

"Sure, Bobby. Look, I'll talk to the front office. See if we can get you a new project, you own team."

"Don't bother." His expression was stony. "They've offered me early retirement and I'm going to take it. I'm sixty-one years old, Tony. How old are you these days?"

"I'm sorry, Bobby. I think you've done wonders bringing Share this far." He gave Belotti his deal-closing smile. "Where can I get some samples?"

Belotti nodded, as if he had been expecting Cage to ask. "Still can't keep your hands off the product? They're keeping a pretty tight lid on the stuff, you know. Until they decide what they've got.

"I'm a special case, Bobby. You ought to know that by now. Some rules just don't apply to me."

Belotti hesitated. He looked as if he were trying to balance some incredibly complex equation.

"Come on, Bobby. For an old friend?"

With a poisonous grin, Belotti thumbed a printreader to unlock his desk, took a green bottle from the top drawer and tossed it to Cage. "One at a time, understand? And you didn't get it from me."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cage popped the top. Six pills: yellow powder in clear casings. For a moment he was suspicious; Belotti seemed awfully eager to break company rules. But Cage had long since made up his mind about the man. He could not bring himself to worry about someone for whom he had so little respect. He tried to imagine what it would have been like to be ordinary like poor Belotti: old, at the end of a failed career, bitter, and tired. What kept a man like that alive? He shivered and pushed the fantasy away as he pocketed the green bottle. "What time is it, anyway?" he said. "I told Shaw I'd meet him for lunch."

Belotti touched the temple of his eyeglasses and the lenses opaqued. "You know, I really used to hate you. Then I realized it: you didn't know what the hell you were doing. Might as well blame a cat for batting around a bloody mouse. You don't see anyone, Tony. I'll bet you don't even see yourself." His hands shook. "That's all right, I'll shut up now." He powered down his terminal. "I'm going home. Only reason I came in was because they said you wanted a meeting."

Taking no chances, Cage had one of Belloti's samples analyzed: it was pure. Then, rather than risk anymore confrontation, Cage moved on. There were lawyers in Washington and accountants in New York. He spoke at the American Psychopharmacological Association's annual meeting at Hilton Head in South Carolina and gave half a dozen telelink interviews. He met a Japanese woman and they made reservations to spend a weekend in orbit at Habitat Three. Afterwards they went to Osaka where he found out she was a corporate spy for Unico. It had been almost two months. Time, he thought, for Tod to have screwed up, for Wynne to have recognized that he was born to fail, and for their impossible affair to have collapsed under its own weight. Cage caught the suborbital to Heathrow. He was so sure.

It was a nasty surprise: Tod Schluerman had been lucky.

The video *Burn London* was only five minutes long. It started with a shot of silos. Countdown. Launch. London was under attack. No missiles—enormous naked Wynnes left rainbows across the sky as they hurtled down on the city. They exploded not in flame but in foliage, smothering entire city blocks with trees and brush. Soon the city disappeared beneath a forest. The camera zoomed to a clearing where a band called Flog was playing. They had been providing the dreamy sound track. The tempo picked up, the group played faster and faster until their instruments caught fire, consuming them and the forest. The final shot was a pan over ash and charred stumps. Cage thought it was dumb.

No one could have predicted that sixteen-year-olds across the UK would choose that moment to take Flog into their callow hearts. When they made *Burn London* with Tod, Flog was unknown. In the span of a month they went from a basement in Leeds to a floor of Claridges in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

London. Although Tod did not make much money from *Burn London*, he had earned a name. The kid who had once compared himself to Nam June Paik was instead making videos for pubescent music fans.

He and Wynne were living at a tube rack in Battersea. She could have afforded better; he insisted that they live within his means. There were about two hundred plastic sleep tubes stacked in what had once been a warehouse. Each was three meters long; the singles were a meter and a half in diameter, the doubles two. Each was furnished with a locker beneath a gel mattress, a telelink terminal, and a water bubbler passing for a sink. There was always a line for the showers. The toilets smelled.

It was all right for Tod; he spent most of his time haunting the video labs or dealing with band managers. He even had a desk at VidStar and a regularly scheduled session on its synthesizer: Four to five A.M., Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. But Wynne was only in the way at VidStar. And although they went out almost every night to clubs around London to hear bands play and show Tod's videos, there seemed to be very little for Wynne to do. Cage could not understand why she seemed so happy.

"Because I'm in love," she said. "For the first time in my life."

"I'm glad for you, Wynne. Believe me." They were sitting over lagers in a pub, waiting for Tod to finish work and join them for dinner. It was dark. It was easier to lie in the dark. "But how long can it last unless you find something to do? Something for yourself."

"So I can be famous. Like you?" She chuckled as she rubbed her finger along the rim of her glass. "Why should you care about that now, Tony? You were the one who said I should take some time off after I finished sixth form."

"I've thought a lot since you've been with Tod. You could get into any school you wanted."

"You know how Tod feels about school. Still, I have considered taking some business courses. I thought I might be Tod's manager. That would give him more time to do the important work. He's really good and he's still learning, that's what's so incredible. Did you get a chance to see *Burn London* yet?"

Cage nodded.

"Did you recognize the women?"

"Of course."

She smiled. *She was proud of being in Tod's video.* Cage realized his plan of inaction had gone very, very wrong. He would have to intervene in their affair or he might never get Wynne back.

"Good news," said Tod as he slipped onto the bench beside Wynne. They kissed. "I sold them on the idea. I've got a commission to shoot a thirty minute video at the free festival."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wynne hugged him. "That's great, Tod. I knew you could do it."

"Free festival?" said Cage. "What are you talking about?"

"You know, man." Tod finished the rest of Wynne's lager. "You're always lecturing us about it; that's when I got the idea. I'm going to do a video of the solstice celebration. At Stonehenge."

History does not record the first use of drugs at Stonehenge. However, there is little doubt that most of the major hallucinogens available in 1974 were ingested during the first Stonehenge free festival. An offshore pirate music station, Radio Caroline, had urged its listeners to come to Stonehenge for a festival of "love and awareness." On solstice day that year a horde of scruffy music fans in their late teens and twenties set up camp in the field next to the car park. The music back then was called rock; apparently no pun was intended. The empty landscape around the stones was filled with tents and teepees, cars and caravans. Electric guitars screamed and there was a whiff of marijuana on the summer breeze. There are tapes of those early festivals. A vast psychedelia of humanity would gather for the occasion: the glassy-eyed couple from Des Moines in their matching polyester shirts, the smiling engineer from Tokyo taking movies, the young mother from Luton breast-feeding her infant son on the Altar Stone, the Amesbury bobby standing beneath the outer circle, hands clasped behind his back, the Druid from Leicester in her white ceremonial robes, the longhaired teenager from Dorking who had climbed the great trilithon and was shouting something about Jesus, UFO's, the sun and the Beatles. The festival has always been one of the great surrounds for getting twisted. The pioneers of hallucinogens had a colorful term for the radical perceptual jolts of such an experience, the fascinating strangeness of it all. They would have called the Stonehenge free festival a mind-blower.

Wynne and Tod had their sleep tube shipped from the rack in Battersea to Stonehenge for the five-day festival. It and a thousand others lay near the old car park across the A360 from the dome which now protected the stones. The tubes looked like giant white Soar capsules scattered in the grass. In between were tension bubbles, gortex tents of varying geometries, hovers and cars and even people sitting in folding chairs beneath gaudy umbrellas. Cage stayed at an inn at Amesbury and watched the festival on telelink.

On solstice eve he was able to coax Tod and Wynne into town with the promise of a free dinner. He proposed his little experiment over dessert.

"I don't know, man." Tod looked doubtful. "Tomorrow is the last day, the big one. I don't know if I ought to be eating experimental drugs."

Cage had expected that Tod might balk; he was counting on Wynne.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, Tod," she said, "you'll be the only one there that won't be twisted. Why not get into the spirit of the thing?" Her eyes seemed very bright. "Look, how many hours have you shot already? Forty, fifty? They only want a half hour. And even if you miss anything, you can always synthesize it."

"I know that," he said irritably. "It's just that I'm tired. Can hardly think anymore." He sipped his claret. "Maybe, okay? Just maybe. But start over again. Tell me from the beginning."

Cage began by claiming that he had been impressed by *Burn London*; he said he wanted to get to know Tod better, understand his art. Cage spoke of the inspiration he had had while watching the festival on telelink. They would all take Share and go to the solstice celebrations together, relying on Stonehenge, the crowd, and each other for cues to shape their experience. Cage spoke of the aesthetics of randomness as an answer to the problem of selection. He said they might be on the verge of a historic discovery; Share might well be a new way for non-artists to participate in the very act of artistic creation.

Cage did not mention that he had laced Tod's dose of Share with an anticholinergic which would smash his psychological defenses flat. When Tod was completely vulnerable to suggestion—stripped of the capacity to lie—Cage would begin interrogating. He would force Tod to tell the truth; force Wynne to see how this shallow boy was using her to further his career. At that moment Wynne, too, would see the ugliness that Cage had seen all along beneath the handsome face. When Tod revealed just how little he cared for her, their affair would be over.

"Come on, Tod," said Wynne. "We haven't done chemicals together in a long time. I'm tired of getting twisted alone. And when Tony recommends something like this, you know it has to be a killer flash."

"You're sure I'll be able to function while we're on this stuff?" Tod's resistance was wearing down. "I don't want to waste the day shooting blades of grass."

"I'll bring something to neutralize it. If you have problems you can poke yourself straight anytime you want. Don't worry, Tod. Look, the action of Share should actually help you be more visually oriented. You yourself have said that language gets in the way of art. Share strips away the superstructure of preconceptions. You won't know what you're seeing; you'll just see it. The eyes of a child, Tod. Think of it."

For a moment Cage wondered if he had overdone it. Wynne's attention turned; she seemed more interested in what he was saying than in Tod's reaction to it. He could feel her appraising stare but did not acknowledge it. The waiter came with the check and as Cage signed for it, he dangled the real bait before Tod.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If you're afraid to try it, Tod, just say so. It is something new, after all. No one would blame you for backing out."

"Very good, sir." A true Englishman, the waiter pretended not to hear as Cage handed him the check. "Thank you, sir."

"Still," Cage continued, "I believe in Share and I believe in you. So much so that when you're done I'd like to show your video to Western Amusement. They haven't decided yet how to market Share. If this video is as good as I think it can be, the problem will be solved. I'll make them buy it. You'll be the spokesman—hell, the father—of a new collaborative art form."

He knew he had Tod then. This was what the kid had wanted all along. Cage had seen right away that Tod had only seduced Wynne as a career move. All right then, let Tod have his introduction to an entertainment multinational—and on his own terms. Let him believe that he had manipulated Cage. It did not matter as long as Cage got Wynne back.

"What are you doing, Tony?" Wynne said. Beneath her skin tint, she had gone pale. She must have suspected the stakes Cage was playing for.

"What am I doing?" Cage stood, laughing. "I'm not really sure. That's what makes it interesting, isn't it?"

"Okay, man." Tod stood, too. "I'll try it."

"Tony." Wynne stared up at them.

"What's that?" said Wynne, pointing at Stonehenge. Bolts of lightning forked through the darkness, illuminating the crowd which stood outside the dome.

"It's only the *son et lumiere*," said Cage. "The holo techs from the Department of Environment put it on to soak a few extra quid from the tourists." They kept walking up the A360 from where the Amesbury shuttle had dropped them. "Watch what comes next."

Seconds later two laser rainbows shimmered between the stones. "Stonehenge's greatest hits," said Tod with contempt. "Both Constable and Turner did major paintings here. Turner's was full of his usual bombast, lightning bolts and dead shepherds and howling dogs. Constable tried to jack up his boring watercolor with a double rainbow."

Cage bit his lip and said nothing. He did not really need a lecture on Stonehenge, especially not from Tod. After all, he *owned* one of Constable's Stonehenge sketches.

Tod flipped down the visor of his VidStar helmet; he looked like a mantis with lens eyes. Cage could hear tiny motors buzzing as the twin cameras focused. "Is anyone else starting to feel it?" said Wynne.

"I've been doing a lot of research on this place, you know," Tod continued. "It's amazing, the people who've been here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes," Cage said. "It's an oozy kind of coolness spreading across the back of my skull—like mud." They had eaten the capsules of Share in the darkness on the ride over. "What time is it?"

"It's 4:18." Tod slipped a fresh disk into the drive clipped to his belt. "Sunrise at 5:07."

Cage looked to the northeast; the sky had already started to lighten. The stars were like glass mites scuttling away into the grayness.

"They come in waves," said Wynne. "Hallucinations."

"Yes," Cage said. The backs of his eyes seemed to tingle. He knew there was something wrong but he could not think what it was.

They pushed past the inevitable Drug Temperance League picket line; luckily, none of them recognized Cage. At last they reached a barbed-wire corridor leading through the crowd to the entrance of the dome. Down the corridor marched a troop of ghosts. They were dressed in white robes; some wore glasses. They carried copper globes and oak branches and banners with images of snakes and pentacles. They were male and female, and they seemed old. They were murmuring a chant that sounded like wind blowing through fallen leaves. Dry old ghosts, crinkly and intent, turned inward as if they were working out chess problems in their heads.

"The Druids," said Tod. The words broke the trance and a shiver danced across Cage's shoulders. He glanced at Wynne and could tell instantly that she had felt the same. A smile of recognition lit her face in the pre-dawn gloom.

"Are you all right?" said Tod.

Wynne laughed. "No."

Tod frowned and linked his arm through hers. "Let's go. We have to walk around the dome if we want to see the sun rise over the Heel Stone."

They began to thread their way through the crowd to the southwest side of the dome. The space between the shells was empty now and Cage could see that the procession of Druids had surrounded the outer sarsen circle. All turned to the northeast to face the Heel Stone and the approaching sunrise.

"This is it," said Tod. "We're right on the axis."

The fat woman standing next to Cage was glowing. Except for knee-high studded leather leggings, she was naked. Her skin gave off a soft green light: her nipples and all of her body hair were bright orange. When she moved the rolls of fat gleamed like moonlit waves. At first he thought she was another hallucination. Something wrong.

"Do you see her too?" Wynne whispered.

"She's a glowworm." Tod made no effort to keep his voice down, and the green woman stared at them.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wynne nodded as if she had understood. Cage cupped his hand to her ear. "What's a glowworm?"

"She's had a luminescent body tint," came the whispered reply.

Tod laughed as he pointed his lenses at her. "Do you know how carcinogenic that stuff is? Eighty percent mortality after five years."

She waddled over to him. "It's my body, Flash. Ain't it?" Cage was surprised when she slipped a hand around Tod's waist. "Would that be a video you're making, Flash? Me in it?"

"Sure," he said. "Everyone gets to be famous for ten minutes. You know the camera loves you, glowworm. That's why you got tinted."

She giggled. "You with someone, Flash?"

"Not now, glowworm. The sun is coming."

Amateur photographers and professional cameramen began to jostle for position around them. Tod, using his elbows with cunning, would not be moved. The sun's bright lip appeared over the trees to the northeast. Inside the dome Druids raised horns and blew a tribute to the new day. Outside there were inarticulate shouts and polite applause. A man with a long beard rolled on the ground, barking.

"But there's no alignment," some fool was complaining. "The sun's in the wrong place."

The sun had cleared the trees and crawled across the brick-colored horizon. Cage shut his eyes and still he could see it: blood red, flashing blue, veins pulsing across its surface.

"Sun's not wrong," said a man with a camera where his head should have been. "Stonehenge doesn't really line up. Never did. It's a myth, man."

Although he did not immediately recognize the man, Cage knew he hated that mocking voice. When he opened his eyes again the sun had already climbed several of its diameters into the sky. After a few moments it passed over the Heel Stone at the opposite end of Stonehenge. And seemed to hang there, propped in the sky by a single untrimmed sarsen, five meters tall. His view was framed by the uprights and lintels of the outer circle. It was as if he were standing on the backbone of the world. He was spellbound: men in skins had built a structure that could capture a star. The crowd was silent, or perhaps Cage had ceased to perceive anything but his vision of sunfire and stone. Then the moment passed. The sun continued to climb.

"Looks like a doorway," said the glowworm. "Into another world." She seemed pale in the light of dawn.

Doorway. The word filled his mind. *Doorway raised upon doorway.* Someone said, "I make it about four degrees off." Cage saw people crouching to help the barking man.

"Tony?" A strange and beautiful woman had taken his hand. Her voice

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO OUP.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

echoed and distorted: a baby's inexact chatter, the joyful cry of a child. He blinked at her in the soft light. Blue-skinned, hair in spikes, she was dressed in silver: the setting for a sapphire. Her face, a jewel. Precious. Cage was falling in love.

"Who are you?" He could not remember.

"They come in waves," she said. He did not understand.

"He's so far out he's breathing space," said the camera head with the mocking voice.

"Who are you?" Cage held up her hand, clasped in his.

"It's me, Tony." The beautiful woman was laughing. Cage wanted to laugh too. "Wynne."

Wynne. He said the word over and over to himself, shuddering with pleasure at each repetition. Wynne. His Wynne.

"And I'm Tod, remember?" The camera head looked disgusted. "Christ, am I glad I palmed that stuff. Look at you two. She can't stop laughing and you're catatonic. How was I supposed to work? Do you realize how twisted you are?"

Tod. Cage battered through yet another wave of hallucinations, trying to remember. A plan . . . force Tod . . . make Wynne see . . . Cage had known it all along. But it was no good if Tod were straight. "You didn't take . . . ?"

"Hell no!" Tod turned. Cage felt the lens eyes probing him, recording, judging. "I'm not as gullible as you think, man. I decided to fake it, see how the stuff affected you first. If it looked like fun I knew I could always catch up."

There was a tiny red light flashing in the middle of Tod's helmet. "Turn it off, you bastard," Cage said. "Not me into your damn . . . your god damn . . ."

"No?" Cage could see a smile beneath the visor. "You're a public figure, man. We all own a piece of you."

"Tod," said Wynne. "Don't goad him."

The red light went out. He flipped the visor up and held out his hand to her. She let go of Cage and went to him. "Let's take a walk, Wynne. I want to talk to you."

As he watched them walk away together Cage felt as though he were turning to stone. He had lost her. The crowd swirled around them and they were gone.

"Aren't you Tony Cage?"

He stared without comprehension at a middle-aged woman wearing a mood dress. It changed from blue to silvery-green as she called to her husband. "Marv, come quick." A paunchy man in isothermals responded to her summons. "You are Tony Cage, aren't you?"

Cage could not speak. The man shook his nerveless hand. "Sure, we've

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seen you on telelink. Lots of times. We're from the States. New Hampshire. We've tried all your drugs."

"But Soar's still our favorite. I'm Sylvie. We're retired." The dress lightened from lime to apple green. Cage could not look her in the face.

"I'm Marv. Say, you look pretty twisted. What are you on, anyway? Something new?"

Heads were turning. "Sorry." His tongue was stone. "Not feeling well. Have to . . ." By then he was stumbling away from his manic fans. Luckily they did not follow.

He did not remember how long he wandered through the crowd or how he felt or what exactly he was looking for. A terrible suspicion nagged at him . . . maybe something was wrong with the dose? Eventually the Druids finished their service and the dome was opened to the public. He drifted on a floodtide of humanity and at last washed up on the Slaughter Stone.

The Slaughter Stone was a slab of lichen-covered sarsen about thirty meters away from the outer circle: a good place to sit and watch, away from the hurly-burly around the standing stones. The surface of the stone was pitted and rough. It once was thought that these natural bowls were used to catch sacrificial blood—both human and animal. Another myth, since the stone originally stood upright. Now they were two fallen things, Cage and the stone, their foundations undermined, purposes lost. They existed in roughly the same state of consciousness. Cage thought sandstone thoughts; his understanding was that of rock.

The sun climbed. Cage was hot. The combination of body heat and solar gain had overloaded the dome's air conditioning. He did nothing. The waves of hallucinations seemed to have receded. People had climbed the outer circle and walked along the lintels. One woman started to strip. The crowd clapped and urged her on. "Vestal virgin, vestal virgin," they cried. A little boy nearby watched avidly as he squeezed cider from a disposable juice bulb. Cage was thirsty; he did nothing. The boy dropped the bulb on the ground when he had finished and wandered off. A bobby stepped out from beneath the circle to watch as the stripper removed her panties. The crowd roared and she gave them an extra treat. She was an amputee; she unstrapped her prosthetic forearm and waved it over her head. The world was going mad and trying to take Cage with it. He loaded a neuroleptic into his pressure syringe and poked it into his forearm.

"Tony."

There was no Tony. There was only stone.

"Hey, man." A stranger shook him. "It's me. Tod. There's something wrong with Wynne! We need to know what you took."

"In waves." Cage started to laugh. "They come in waves." Now he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knew. Hallucinations. But not with Share. He was laughing so hard he fell backwards onto the stone. "Belotti!" Poor Bobby had finally struck—after all these years. The drug was pure but the dose . . . Too high. Hallucinogen. Dangerous, he had said. Unpredictable. That unpredictable old . . ."Bastard!" Cage was gasping for air.

"He needs oxygen. Quick."

"Look at his eyes!"

When the last wave hit him, Cage held on to the stone. The crowd disappeared. The dome vanished. The car park, the A360, all signs of civilization—gone. Then the stones awoke and began to dance. Those that had fallen righted themselves. A road erupted from the grass. The Slaughter Stone bucked and threw him as it stood. A twin appeared beside it: a gate. He wanted to pass through, walk down the road, see Stonehenge whole. But the magic held him back. In an overly explained world, only the subtlest and most powerful magic of all had survived. The magic that works exclusively in the mind. A curse. A dead and illiterate race had placed a curse upon the imagination of the world. In its rude magnificence Stonehenge challenged all to understand its meaning, yet its secret was forever locked behind impenetrable walls of time.

"Lay him down here."

"Tony!"

"He can't hear you."

Suddenly they were all around him, all of those who had stood where Cage now stood. The politicians and writers and painters and historians and scientists and the tourists—yes, even the tourists who, in search of an hour's diversion, had found instead a timeless mystery. All of those who had accepted Stonehenge's challenge, and fallen under the curse. They had striven with words and images to find the secret, yet all they had seen was themselves. The sun grew very bright then, and the sides of the stones turned silver. Cage could see all the ghosts reflected in the bright stones. He could see himself.

"Tony, can you hear me? Wynne's having some kind of fit. You have to tell us."

Cage saw himself in the Slaughter Stone. What did it matter? He had already lost her. His image seemed to shimmer. He looked like a ghost; the thought of death did not displease him. To be as a stone.

"Wake up, man. You have to save her. *She's your daughter, damn you!*"

"No." At that moment Cage's reflection in the stone shifted and he saw his mirror image. Wynne. In pain. He realized that she had been in pain for a long time, had hidden it behind a veneer of chemicals and feigned toughness. He should have known. Trapped within the magical logic of the hallucination, now he could actually *feel* her pain and was racked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by the certain knowledge that he was its source. It was no longer the drug, it was Stonehenge itself that forced him to suffer with her, Stonehenge that created a magic landscape where the veil of words was parted and mind could touch mind directly. Or so it seemed to Cage. A Sound tore through the vision: a scream. "No!" Stones fell, disappeared, but Cage could not escape the pain. All the lies Cage had told himself fell away. In a moment of terrible grace, he realized what he had done. *To his daughter.*

Tod had lost his helmet, probably lying on the turf somewhere, shooting closeups of blades of grass. He seemed very pale beneath his blue skin tint. Cage blinked, trying to remember what it was that he had asked. There were electrodes taped to Cage's head and wrist. A medic was checking readouts.

"What did you give her?" said the medic.

Cage's hands trembled as he fumbled the pressure syringe from his pocket. "This . . . a poke . . . neuroleptic. She needs it now. Now!"

The medic seemed very young; he looked doubtful. Cage sat up, tore the electrode from his temple. "Do you know who I am?" The world was spinning. "Do it!"

The medic looked briefly at Tod, then took the syringe and ran back toward the standing stones. Tod hesitated, staring at Cage.

"What did you say to her?" Cage tried to stand up.

He put his arm around Cage's shoulders to steady him. "Are you all right?"

"Did you say it to her? That she was my daughter?"

"That's what she thinks. We were arguing about it."

"She was my lover. You know that, I guess. She came to me one night. Three years ago. We were both twisted. I couldn't . . . I couldn't send her away."

Tod looked straight ahead. "She said that. She said it was her fault. Then the fit hit her."

"No." Cage could still see himself; he would never be able to stop seeing himself again. "I was lonely so I made sure that she was lonely too. And called it love." The word almost choked him. "Where is she? Take me to her." They started to walk. "Do *you* love her, Tod?"

"I don't know, man." He considered for some time. "Feels something like."

She was unconscious but the fit had passed and the medic said her signs were good. Cage went with Tod to the hospital. They waited all day; they talked about everything but what was most on their minds. Cage realized that he had made a mistake about Tod. So many mistakes. When Wynne at last regained consciousness, Tod went in to see her. Alone.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm not here," Cage said. "Tell her I've gone away."

"I can't do that."

"Tell her!"

They only gave Tod ten minutes. Cage kept worrying that Tod would call him in.

"Is she all right?"

"Seems to be. She asked about you; I told her you went back to your room to sleep it off. I told her you'd be in tomorrow. They're going to keep her overnight."

"I'm leaving, Tod." Cage offered his hand. "You won't be seeing me again."

"What? You can't do that to her, man. She saw something this morning, something that makes her feel guilty as hell. If you just disappear she's going to feel worse. Do you understand? You owe it to her to stay."

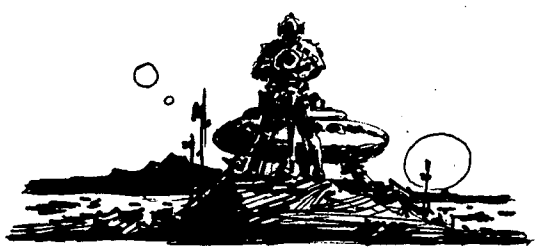
Cage let his hand fall to his side. "You want me to be some kind of a hero, Tod. Problem is, I'm a coward—always have been. I saw something today too, and I'll spend the rest of my life trying to forget it. She'll . . . *you'll* both be better off without me."

Tod grabbed him by the shoulders. "You're damn well going see her tomorrow. Listen to me, man! If you love her at all . . ."

"I love her." Cage shook free. "Like I love myself."

That night he caught the shuttle from Heathrow to Shannon. He knew Tod was right; it was cruel and selfish to run away. Tod was entitled to think what he wanted. He would never know how much it hurt Cage to give Wynne up this way . . . If Cage was escaping, it was into pain. He hoped Wynne would understand. Eventually. His beautiful Wynne. It took a few days to put his affairs in order. He assigned a fortune in Western Amusement stock to her. He made a tape for her, said goodbye.

There is a mist clinging to the land. The slaty grayness of Galway Bay reminds Cage of sarsen. The cryogenic box awaits, set for a hundred years. He does not know whether this is enough to save her. Or himself. He knows he will probably never see her again. But for a time, at least, he will be at peace. He will sleep the inscrutable sleep of stones. ●



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SPRING AND THE BLACK HOLES

When green things grow, in glowing spring,
I attend to nature for a time, dreaming
That there is meaning, something, beyond
What I can tell, not merely the Heaven and Hell
Of whirling galaxies, not Byron's dreamless sleep,
Or merely to be part of the dust that swirls,
And someday to be sucked in, as by
A celestial vacuum cleaner, a black hole,
Into a what? another universe, still dust?
A what? The soul must be my vademecum
Or life and spring become intolerable.

But I am trapped, caught in the trap of life,
The spring of death. Yet it's not death
Which is the worst pain of my soul;
It's *rerum natura*, it's the black holes,
It's the not knowing, not being allowed,
Which is allowed even in bright spring,
Even in prime spring when green things grow.

And suppose there is no dreamless sleep? Suppose
We wake somehow to feel again
And what we feel is endless pain,
Pain of time and space being born,
Birthpang of stars, the spaceless yet infinite
Pain of the black holes, where time, perhaps
Runs backward, or, worse, does not run at all,
But leaves your shadow magnified stiff,
Frozen forever, upon its lip,
While every molecule, still
Sentient, is smoked and rayed apart,
While still, while still, though somewhere else,
Green things grow, in glowing spring.

—E. M. Schorb

LICENSED TO ONZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Free Live Free
By Gene Wolfe
Mark V. Ziesing Publisher, $45

This is a no-win review.

Gene Wolfe's new novel has appeared in a limited edition of 750 copies, which means that it is already out of print and unavailable. So why review it in a column that serves as a "shopping list" (as one science fictional type, with the usual tact, called it)? There will be the inevitable complaints from the acquisitive (of the "don't tell me about it if I can't have it" persuasion).

On the other hand, a big new novel from a major author is an event; ignoring it leaves one open to complaints from another quarter.

On the whole, I regard a book review as a service to readers; it provides information as to what's being published; the opinion part of it must always be regarded as just that—one man's (educated) opinion. (It provides a service for the author, too, though you'd never know it to listen to some of them. It disseminates information about his/her book; those who rail against critics might pause and think what it would be like if their books appeared with no notice whatsoever—though some would obviously prefer to see only what the publishers' publicity hacks write about them.)

So full speed ahead and damn the torpedos—the public has a right to know (even if they can't buy).

After all that . . .

What is Mr. Wolfe getting at?

Free Live Free has four central characters, all losers. Candy is the traditional whore with a heart of you-know-what (this doesn't help her weight, which is over 200 pounds). Stubb is a down-at-the-heels private operative, which is several degrees lower than a private detective. Barnes is a seedy salesman, reduced to peddling tricks and jokes. Madame Serpentina is a gypsy psychic and con artiste.

They have all answered a classified ad which begins "FREE LIVE FREE" in which room is offered no charge by one Ben Free in his house (all this takes place in an anonymous city in—I'd guess—the Midwest). His stated reason for this dubious charity (it's a pretty run-down domicile) is that the house is about to be leveled by the city to make way for a freeway, and he needs help to prevent it. The house is indeed demolished despite the wholehearted aid of the four disparate roomers. (They are amaz-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ingly resourceful for the losers they're portrayed to be. Candy, for instance, applies baby oil to her ample body and then just sits down—an immovable object; Barnes calls every insurance salesman he knows and makes an appointment for the time of the demolition, giving the name of the police officer in charge.)

In the brouhaha, Ben Free disappears, and most of the rest of the book is devoted to the quartet's search for him, in which picaresque mission they meet many eccentric characters (Alexandra Duck, a reporter for a magazine devoted to spiritualism; an AWOL sailor; a schizophrenic clown whose straight and clown aspects are two different people), most of whom keep re-appearing and most of whom also seem to have some interest in Ben Free. The foursome's search is not totally altruistic; Ben has implied he owns something very valuable.

The search reels from one goofy situation to another; at one point they all end up in a posh hotel in which they wreak havoc from the bar to room 777. At another they come together (by different unlikely routes) in the municipal madhouse; then there's the city-wide blackout. It's like a 1930s screwball comedy updated by Robert Altman, with a dash of William Saroyan (there's some of that Saroyanesque whimsy).

This goes on for about four hundred fifty of the novel's five hundred pages, more or less amusingly so depending on your tolerance for madcap treasure hunts and frenetic characters. Then, abruptly to say the least, you are given a science fictional explanation of what so far has been a sort of antic mystery story. (The only suggestion of fantasy up to now has been a hint of precognitive powers on the part of the gypsy, and her belief that Free's "treasure" is something mystical.)

As with any mystery, it would be cheating to give away the dénouement, but I'm not sure I could if I wanted to. It has something to do with time travel, and a huge wooden airplane that's been caught aloft in the jet stream since 1940 or thereabouts. But whimsy substitutes for rationality, and this reader was left none too sure who had done what, with what, and to whom.

There are apparently plans to publish *Free Live Free* later this year in a general release hardcover edition. Rumor has it that there will be changes made then, so *this* edition might be considered a work in progress.

As I said, this is a no-win review.

Dayworld
By Philip José Farmer
Putnam's, $16.95

A new Farmerworld from Philip José, another playful practitioner of the writing art, is to hand, his first series since the popular Riverworld sequence. This one's initial volume is *Dayworld*—and you thought the Riverworld was complicated.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fifteen hundred years in the future, only one-seventh of the population is operative on any one day. Just before midnight on, say, Tuesday, everyone rushes home (or the equivalent) and goes into a process of suspended animation (called "stoning") for six days. Then Wednesday's population wakes up, lives its day, and gives way to Thursday's children.

Each "world" has its own culture; Tuesday's is slightly Chinese flavored, while Wednesday's is Amerind and Bengali. And it is very, very naughty indeed to stay up from one day to the next.

Farmer follows a familiar course with his plot; his hero, Jeff Caird, is a rebel and a "daybreaker." He not only doesn't just stay in Tuesday where he belongs (and is —another familiar twist—part of the "organic police" force), he participates in every day of the week!

This is because he is part of an outlaw organization, the immers, who are widespread throughout the society, and who have discovered the secret of the prolongation of life. (Everyone, of course, lives *objectively* seven times as long as they ordinarily would, since the body doesn't age while "stoned," but *subjectively* it's the same old life span.)

And, to add complication to complexity, Jeff has not only a different identity every day of the week, he has a different personality, induced by self-hypnosis.

The novel follows him through the course of a week. It's a very busy week, since there's a homicidal maniac daybreaker out to get him. The ramifications, complications, and implications are staggering.

Farmer keeps the ball bouncing along at top speed. If you can overlook some of the numerous problems raised by his initial premise and left unexplained, you'll have a good week.

Star Healer
By James White
Del Rey, $2.75 (paper)

Sector General is that big St. Elsewhere in the sky, where seventy various races cure and research the ills and hurts of that many and more species, products of myriad different planetary environments. Its correct name is Sector Twelve General Hospital, and it lies between our Galaxy and the equally densely populated Greater Magellanic Cloud; it has 384 levels, built to reproduce even the most outré of atmospheres, pressures, gravities, and temperatures.

James White has given us many entertaining tales about the goings-on at Sector General; the latest is a novel, *Star Healer*. Like the others, it is unashamedly a puzzle story; the Sector General canon bears as much relation to the detective story as it does to SF. An intriguing problem is set—and given the possibilities inherent in the biochemical complications of the myriad life forms predicated by White, the problems are infinite

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—and is solved. *Star Healer*, being a novel, has *several* problems going, more or less shuffled together rather than end to end. This causes the reader a certain amount of unease; all the problems are emergencies and a couple are life and death matters and the doctor-detectives sometimes seem to spend an inordinate amount of time discussing one problem while the others hang fire. Oh, well, maybe that's the way the medical profession works.

The problems faced by young Dr. Kil . . . sorry, Dr. Conway in the present series of crises include some real dillies. There's a whole planetary culture that hasn't got anywhere much toward civilization because any time any one of them gets upset, it pushes a sort of telepathic panic button. The result is that everyone in the vicinity links up together physically (they resemble Velcro [TM] cacti) and becomes a rampaging mindless mob that destroys everything in sight. This leads, as one can see, to a tendency to individual isolationism.

There is the huge race with fine minds from a 4G planet whose elderly become trapped in rapidly deteriorating bodies, and who usually go mad. (This one's a little too close to an all-too-human problem for comfort.)

Then there's the real winner—a race whose embryos are intelligent, but who become mindless, ravening beasts the minute they're born. This is known only because the unborn are to a degree telepathic. If only *one* individual can be born without the mentally destructive chemical changes taking place, the whole race might be transformed. This leads to one of the more harrowing birth scenes one has run across.

Add to all this a horrendous accident of a huge space-going passenger vessel, and the fact that Dr. Conway is bucking for the post of Diagnostician. The latter circumstance means that his mind is programmed with the records of several unhuman medical experts, not to mention one of the Velcro [TM] cacti, whose personality he has absorbed by accident. (This *really* complicates his love life, on top of everything else.)

With all this going on, *Star Healer* makes any one of those TV hospital shows look about as complicated as a laxative commercial.

The Heads of Cerberus
By Francis Stevens
Carroll & Graf, $3.50 (paper)

Francis Stevens (real name Gertrude Bennett) is not the first female SF writer (one Mary Shelley would probably get the majority vote for that title), but she is certainly one of the first *American* females to write in the genre. She published in those early fiction magazines which preceded the specialized periodicals; *The Heads of Cerberus* appeared in 1919 in *Thrill Book* (they knew what to call magazines back then—why can't this one have a dignified title like that?). Since then, it has had a lim-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ited hardcover edition, but has never been in paperback.

It is one of the first, if not *the* first, appearances of the alternate time track idea. Stevens fudges it a bit; she wasn't quite ready to present the none-too-sophisticated reading public of the time with the fairly complex concept of parallel times, so what we get is a *sort of* future, *sort of* other world. But you can see what she was getting at.

And it takes place in Philadelphia. (Last month I made the mistake of saying that I knew of no SF novels that take place in Philadelphia; by one of those immutable laws of nature, wouldn't one turn up immediately? And from 1919, no less?) Three young people, the Irishman Terry Trenmore, his sister Viola, and his friend Drayton, breathe the dust contained in a glass vial, the silver cap of which is formed into a likeness of the heads of the mythical Cerberus. It translates them into another Philadelphia, a dictatorship totally isolated from the rest of the U.S.

Here the proles have no names, but answer to numbers. They are ruled by the "Superlatives" (Cleverest, Strongest, etc.) and the "Servants" (of the Great God Penn). It isn't quite so awfully Socially Significant as it sounds, coming across like the combination of an Oz book and *1984*. Our trio has all sorts of adventures, starting with the fact that they don't have numbers, and continuing with their involvement with the ruling class. This, it seems, is descended from the grafting politicians of the turn-of-the-century city, who have discovered a super weapon. It involves vibrations—early SF was big on vibrations, not the mystical "vibes" of the 1960s, but the then exciting theory that different matter could occupy the same space at the same time depending on the rate of vibration of the component atoms. That, it turns out, is what this whole alternate world is based on, and the super weapon turns out to be the recast Liberty Bell, of all things, the ringing of which is supposed to end the entire kit and caboodle. Needless to say, our hero, *in extremis* at the climax, bongs the gong.

The Heads of Cerberus is curiously undated. Certainly it has its share of pulpy melodrama, but the action speeds along, the ideas are clever and original, and Ms. Stevens has a good ear for dialogue. And there is an exquisite chapter concerning a sort of interim world between the worlds, Ulithia, that echos the fey strangeness of George MacDonald's novels and anticipates C.S. Lewis's Narnia ("Go forward, go deeper!" says one of the weird inhabitants, reminding one of the cry, "Further up and further in!" in *The Last Battle*).

I'm not saying this is a lost masterpiece, but it's a lost damn good novel. Some of these early things have a unique freshness about them, written as they were before the conventions of SF were established, and are well worth reading. Ms. Stevens deserves more honor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the history of the genre than she has had, and not *just* because she was a pioneering female.

(Mystery lovers will be intrigued to hear that, according to all my sources, she disappeared without a trace in 1939.)

The Box of Delights
By John Masefield
Dell, $3.95 (paper)

John Masefield? Wasn't he Poet Laureate of England, who wrote "I must go down to the seas again" and other such yo-ho-hokum?

Right. He also wrote two of the most intriguing fantasies in the English language. They're almost totally unknown on this side of the water, but can certainly be compared to the other transcendent English classics such as *The Wind in the Willows* and the above mentioned Narnia books.

First the good news. *The Box of Delights*, which so far as I know has never had an American edition, is finally available.

Now the bad news. *The Midnight Folk*, to which *The Box of Delights* is a sequel and knowledge of which is pretty crucial to the enjoyment of *TBoD*, hasn't been in print here since 1927. The ways of publishers are indeed strange. (The supposed rationale for this particular piece of publisher's whimsy is that it's a tie-in with PBS, which will apparently be showing a dramatization of the second book. If they'd published the first one, they'd have sold it, too, on the strength of the TV connection.)

For those who would like to try *The Box of Delights* nevertheless, *The Midnight Folk* is about young Kay Harker, an orphan who lives at Seekings, his family's estate. The family scandal is that Kay's great-grandfather, a sea captain, is rumored to have returned with a great treasure from the Indies, looted from a Spanish colony; the official story is that the crew turned pirate and ran off with the treasure after marooning the Captain. Kay learns that his governess/guardian, Sylvia Daisy, is a witch, and is on the trail of the treasure with the sanctimonious warlock, Abner Brown.

Kay must find the true story of what happened to the treasure a hundred years ago, and subsequently. He is aided by magic and the creatures (animal and supernatural) of Seekings, who are divided in their loyalties. It is an incredibly complex tale, as Kay is hurled through time and space finding bits and pieces of the history of the treasure—there is nothing simplistic about this fantasy. There is even a brush with Arthurian legend.

Which doesn't leave much room to say anything about *The Box of Delights* save that it's equally complex and equally full of surprises, such as the kidnapping of the entire staff of Tatchester Cathedral (famous for its shrine of St. Cosric, curer of leprosy and broken hearts), including the choir and the bishop. Herne, the Hunter, gets into this one, as does the Trojan War. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

witch and the warlock reappear, this time in search of the Box of Delights (a sort of key to time) carried by Kay's friend, the mysterious Punch and Judy man.

Should you read the second before reading the first (a dim prospect)? A dilemma, indeed. I'd say yes; it's still bound to be a delightful experience.

Hothouse
By Brian Aldiss
Baen, $2.95 (paper)

Amazing, isn't it, how a hit from an established author will bring back those early novels which should have stayed in print in the first place? Equally surprising if such a one reappears under another title, when it's achieved the status of minor classic with the perfectly good title it had to start off with.

The title (or titles) in question at the moment is *The Long Afternoon of Earth,* which has been brought back into print after a lengthy absence, presumably due to the resounding success of Brian Aldiss's Helliconia books. *The Long Afternoon of Earth* (sensational title —unlike so many, both beautiful and apt—makes you want to read the book on the strength of it alone) was published in 1962. In the same year it appeared in England as *Hothouse*, a less interesting name, but apropos, since it is the title of the initial story of the series of short stories and novelettes from which the novel is put together. Apparently the British edition contained about 10,000 more words, due to a nasty job of editing over here; it is the longer version that is now available, and the retitling is justifiable in that sense. Nevertheless, the original American title is the better one, and *caveat emptor*, those who do not like to buy books a second time, even with an additional 10,000 words.

Be that as it may, it's a wonderful novel. The familiar premise of a band of primitive humans struggling against nature run rampant is here presented with vast ingenuity by the young Aldiss. The Earth in the far future has ceased its revolution; the side facing the dying Sun has been taken over by a writhing mass of mixed greens, vegetation that is mobile, carnivorous, and sometimes even sentient.

Flora has triumphed over fauna to the extent that there are only five species of animal life left. Four are insects: the tigerflies, the plantants, the treebees, and the termights; the fifth is the last mammal —man. The "forest" in which they live is one tree—a banyan tree which covers a continent. Under, in, and above that tree, though, are myriad other forms of plant life; Aldiss's invention seems limitless.

The final section presents a vision so audacious that the reviewer almost hesitates to mention it. In any other hands, mobile spider-like plants that spin webs between Earth and the Moon would seem the most outrageous of fantasy vi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

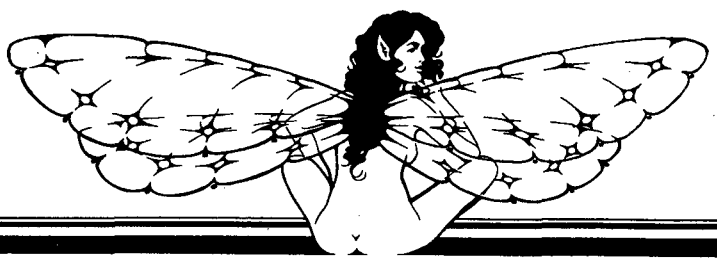
sions. But Aldiss brings it off. You don't believe me? Read it and see.

A good novel by any other name . . .

Shoptalk . . . J.G. Ballard has rather suddenly become the darling of the English intellectual and literary circles (they are not necessarily the same thing). His non-SF novel, *Empire of the Sun*, hit the English bestseller lists in the #3 place, and he is being talked about as the current favorite for the prestigious Booker Prize, one of England's top lit'ry awards. . . .

Since we are dedicated to the furtherance of genre poetry, but feel far from qualified in judging it, we can but mention it as it happens. *All the Clocks Are Melting*, a slim volume of verse, much of it SF, is by Bruce Boston, whose poems have appeared in this magazine. (Velocities Chapbook Series, $3.00, paper, from Velocities, 1509 LeRoy Ave, Berkeley, CA 94708)

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, % The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, N.Y. 10014. ●



NEXT ISSUE

Our July issue will be a very special one, containing as it will a brand-new novella by Roger Zelazny. "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai" will be his first appearance in our pages in over four years, and we're delighted to welcome him back. In addition you'll find work by Lucius Shepard, George Alec Effinger, John Shirley and others. Look for it on sale June 4, 1985.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKET PLACE

ISAAC ASIMOV — is published 13 times a year. The rate for CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS is $2.20 per word — payable in advance — minimum ad $33.00. Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

ART

THE GRAVITY POSTER—The original "Mooney's Module" from ASIMOV's now available as a high-quality, full-color 16"x24" poster. Just send $10.00 plus $1.50 postage and handling to: Mooney's Module, Box 877, Bethel, CT 06801. You'll be amazed and amused!

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

SCIENCE Fiction/fantasy. Free catalog of pulps, digests, paperbacks, hardcovers. Collections also purchased. Ray Bowman, Box 5845A, Toledo, Ohio 43613.

FRANK KELLY FREAS: A SEPARATE STAR. Special Edition, numbered, signed, slip-case, tipped in print, $39.95. Hardcover $24.95; Paperback $14.95. Ppd. Check, M.O., VISA/MasterCard. Kelly Freas, 4216 Blackwater Road, Virginia Beach, VA. 23457. (804) 421-3397.

ALL Available paperbacks, hardcovers supplied quickly & efficiently. Worldwide service since 1973. Quarterly catalogue, free US/CANADA; $1 elsewhere. THE SCIENCE FICTION SHOP, 56 EIGHTH AVE., NY, NY 10014.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

FIREWORKS—Free Catalog, Hundreds of Items. Kellner Fireworks, P.O. Box 67, Oil City, PA 16301.

COMPUTERS & SOFTWARE

FREE Commodore-64/TI99-4A/TRS80-co co/VIC-20/TRS80-MC10/Timex programs! Send stamps! EZRAEZRA, Box 5222-DVF, San Diego, 92105.

MAILING LISTS

COMPUTERIZED, All categories zipcoded. Peel stick labels. 500/$18, 1M/$30, 5M/$125. O'Connors, 3461 Loganview, Baltimore, Baltimore, MD 21222.

MISCELLANEOUS

WIN $50! Get Published! Participate in the first Science Fiction Poetry Contest. Send Sase to: Soft Connections, SF, P.O. Box 324, Wilsonville, OR 97070.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

"HUNDRED$ WEEKLY"! GUARANTEED PROCESSING $TAMPED ENVELOPES! $TART IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: MJG-DPG, AMBLER, PA 19002.

OF INTEREST TO ALL

FREE PRIVACY CATALOG. Cash income opportunities. Secret loans. Asset protection. New identity. Eden, Box 8410-AD, Fountain Valley, CA 92728.

HALLEY'S COMET is coming! See it, photograph it. Comet Trivia. Send $3.00 cash, money order, check to: Comet Handbook, Dept. A, P.O. Box 12484, Portland, OR 97212-0484.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people, 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

TOYS, GAMES & ENTERTAINMENT

KAISSA—The Game from Gor—one true step beyond Chess. Gorean versions of cloth & wood—$15.00. Earthen version in Limited Edition, Bronze & wood—$1500.00. All postage & handling pd. by Port Kar Ind., 19644 S. Falcon Drive, Oregon City, Oregon 97045.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

This is the season for the traditional relaxed Midwestern cons, and the Memorial Day climax to the Spring con season. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a later, longer list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 (long) envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273–6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send an SASE when writing cons. When phoning, identify yourself right off. Look for me at cons with the iridescent "Filthy Pierre" badge.

MAY, 1985

10–12—**MarCon.** For info, write: **Box 14078, Columbus OH 43214.** Or phone: **(703) 273–6111** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Columbus OH (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Sinclair Plaza Hotel. Guests will include: Larry Niven, Carl Lundgren, Bill Marischiello.

10–11—**LASFaS 50.** At 11513 Burbank Blvd., N. Hollywood CA. Fifty years of the LA SF Society.

10–12—**ConJuration.** Camelot Hotel, Tulsa OK. Ed Bryant, M. Resnick, R. A. Lafferty, W. Norwood.

17–19—**ConQuest.** Howard Johnson's, Kansas City MO. G. R. R. Martin, Algis Budrys, C. J. Cherryh, Wm. Wu, W. A. (Bob) Tucker, R. & J. Coulson, W. Norwood, M. McQuay, G. Cook, R. Chilson, R. Bailey.

24–26—**VCon, Box 48478, Bentall Sta., Vancouver BC V7X 1A2.** At UBC. Ghost of Honor: Lovecraft.

24–26—**TallyCon, 824-C W. Tharp, Tallahassee FL 32303. (904) 385–1518.** L. Sprague & C. C. deCamp.

24–27—**BayCon, Box 70393, Sunnyvale CA 94086.** San Jose CA. David Brin, M. Whalen, R. A. Lupoff.

24–27—**DisClave, 3326 Lauriston Pl., Fairfax VA 22031.** Washington DC. DC area's traditional con.

24–27—**CostumeCon, Box 683, Columbia MD 20145.** Costumers' annual con, off West Coast for first time. SF/fantasy & historic masquerades, fashion show. Cut rate for DisClavers (20–30 miles away).

24–27—**MediaWestCon, 5132 Jo-Don Dr., E. Lansing MI 48823.** Of, by, for media SF fans (no stars).

31–Jun 2—**TexarKon, Rt. 4, Box 708X, Texarkana AR 75501. (501) 645–2459.** The deCamps, Asprin.

JUNE, 1985

21–23—**DeepSouthCon, Box 4857, Huntsville AL 35815.** Marion Zimmer Bradley, artist Barclay Shaw, Marta Randall, Bob Sampson. The big annual Southern con, at the birthplace of the US space program.

AUGUST, 1985

22–26—**AussieCon Two, 11863 W. Jefferson Blvd. #1, Culver City CA 90230.** Melbourne, Australia. The WorldCon for 1985. Gene (New Sun) Wolfe, editor/fan Ted White, etc., etc. Join for $40 by June 30.

30–Sep. 2—**ChiliCon, Box 9612, Austin TX 78766.** The N. American Con for 1985. Costs $35 by June 30.

JULY, 1986

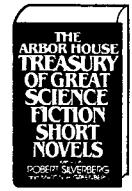
3–6—**WesterCon 39, Box 81285, San Diego CA 92138.** "HalleyCon" (for the comet). D. Brin, G. Bear.

AUGUST, 1986

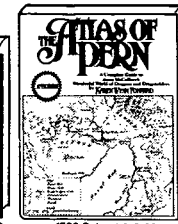
28–Sep. 1—**ConFederation, 2500 N. Atlanta #1986, Smyrna GA 30080. (404) 438–3943.** Atlanta GA. Ray ("Martian Chronicles") Bradbury, fan/editor Terry Carr, Bob (Slow Glass) Shaw. The WorldCon.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Explore new worlds beyond the limits of time and space.

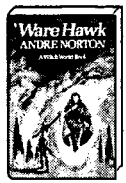


9076 Pub.ed.$19.95



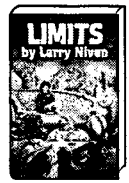
1586 Pub.ed.$19.95

1388 Pub.ed.$15.95



1073 Pub.ed.$11.95

†1529 Spec.ed.



1453 Spec.ed.

1404 Spec.ed.

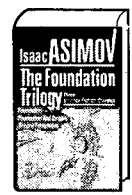
1545 Pub.ed.$14.95

1594 Pub.ed.$11.50

1420 Includes the First, Second and Third Books. Spec.ed.

1537 Deryni Rising; Deryni Checkmate; High Deryni. Spec.ed.

0943 Another Fine Myth; Myth Conceptions; Myth Directions; Hit or Myth. Spec.ed.



6221 Foundation; Foundation and Empire; Second Foundation. Pub.ed.$17.95

0075 Nine Princes in Amber; The Guns of Avalon; The Sign of the Unicorn; The Hand of Oberon; The Courts of Chaos. 2 vols. Comb.pub.ed.$32.30

Take any 5 for $1 WITH MEMBERSHIP.

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR ADDITIONAL SELECTIONS.

†Copyright © 1984 by Paramount Pictures Corporation. STAR TREK is a Trademark of Paramount Pictures Corporation. Registered in The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. All Rights Reserved.

Note: Prices shown are publishers' edition prices.

How the Club Works:

You'll receive your 5 books for only $1 (plus shipping and handling) after your application for membership is accepted. We reserve the right to reject any application. However, once accepted as a member, you may examine the books in your home and, if not completely satisfied, return them within 10 days at Club expense. Your membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come*, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of alternate choices. In addition, up to 4 times a year you may receive offers of special Selections, always at low Club prices. If you want the 2 Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically.

If you don't want a Selection, prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided and return it to us by the date specified.

We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter or continue to enjoy Club benefits for as long as you wish. One of the 2 Selections each month is only $4.98. Other Selections are higher, but always much less than hardcover publishers' editions – up to 65% off. The Club offers more than 300 books to choose from. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. Send no money now, but do mail the coupon today!

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

Dept. AS-001, Garden City, NY 11530

I want the best SF in or out of this world! Please accept my application for membership in the Science Fiction Book Club. Send me the 5 books I have numbered in the boxes below, and bill me just $1 (plus shipping and handling). I agree to the Club Plan as described in this ad. I will take 4 more books at regular low Club prices in the coming year and may resign any time thereafter. SFBC offers serious works for mature readers.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Mr.
Ms. _____
(Please print)

Address _____ Apt. # _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

If under 18, parent must sign. _____

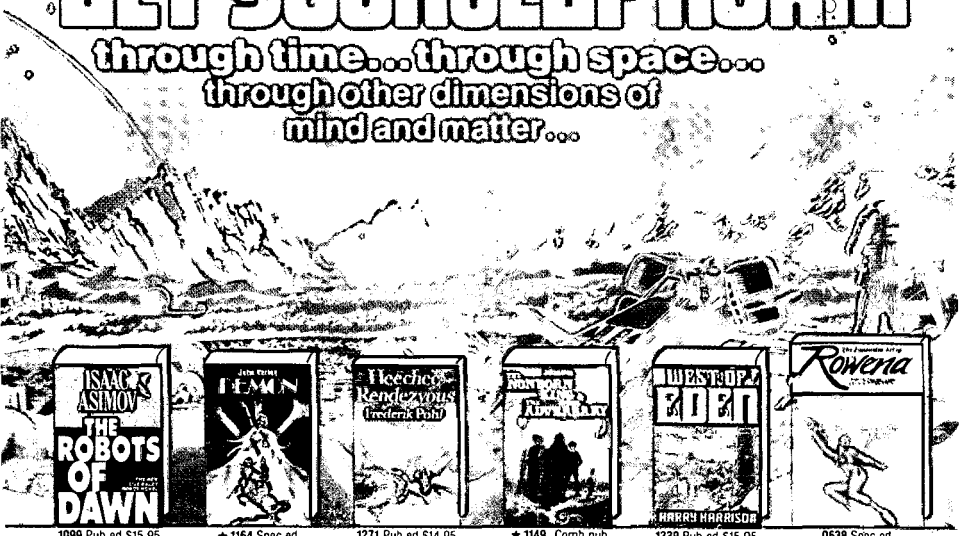
The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Canada. Offer slightly different in Canada.

38-S231O

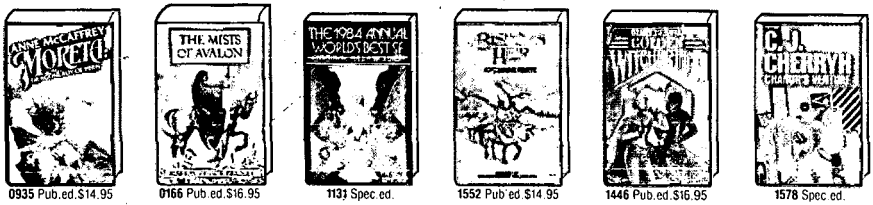
LICENSED TO UNI.COM
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LET YOURSELF ROAM

through time...through space...through other dimensions of mind and matter...



1099 Pub.ed.$15.95 | ★ 1164 Spec.ed. | 1271 Pub.ed.$14.95 | ★ 1149 Comb.pub.ed.$33.90 | 1339 Pub.ed.$15.95 | 0638 Spec.ed.



0935 Pub.ed.$14.95 | 0166 Pub.ed.$16.95 | 1133 Spec.ed. | 1552 Pub.ed.$14.95 | 1446 Pub.ed.$16.95 | 1578 Spec.ed.

0992 Dragonsong; Dragonsinger; Dragondrums. Comb.pub.ed.$38.85 | 1354 Storm Season; The Face of Chaos; Wings of Omen. Spec.ed. | 1560 Damiano; Damiano's Lute; Raphael. Spec.ed. | 0752 Elric of Melniboné; The Sailor on the Seas of Fate; The Weird of the White Wolf. Spec.ed. | 1172 The Vanishing Tower; The Bane of the Black Sword; Stormbringer. Spec.ed. | 1461 The Goblin Tower; The Clocks of Iraz; The Unbeheaded King. Spec.ed.

TAKE ANY 5 FOR $1

WITH MEMBERSHIP

See other side for coupon and additional Selections.

THE SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

38-S2310

Note: Prices shown are publishers' edition prices. ★ Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some.